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THE

POLITICAL LIFE

OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.

AN ANALYTICAL BIOGRAPHY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE TRUE LAW OF POPULATION," "FINANCIAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND," "ESSAY ON MUNDANE MORAL GOVERNMENT," ETC.

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"The People cannot see, but they can feel."

James Harrington's Political Aphorisms.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE session of parliament of the year 1830 was opened by commission on the 4th of February. It found all interests in England suffering under the monetary

difficulties which the attempt during the preceding year to carry the Act of 1819 into something like full effect had necessarily created. A slow but continuous fall of the prices of every commodity, and a consequent want of confidence and growing stagnation in every branch of industry, whether agricultural or mercantile, were the results of this attempt. The working classes, however, were the greatest sufferers; and their complaints were accordingly the loudest as well as the best founded. The distress was felt everywhere. In the manufacturing towns, the want of orders consequent upon the total want of confidence in the stability of prices, was causing numerous concerns to suspend operations and to dismiss the operatives whom they could not longer support. In the country, the farmers, not able, as merchants and manufacturers are, to discontinue their operations, were using every method to reduce the wages of their labourers to the lowest pittance capable of sustaining life; and this endeavour on their part was giving rise to a struggle, on the part of the labourers, of the most deplorable and desperate description. Between employers and employed, in short, throughout the greater part of the United Kingdom, feelings of deadly irritation and hatred began to arise, accompanied, as such feelings are sure to be, with disaffection to the government, upon whom the blame of their existence is always in part thrown.

In consequence of these feelings, the tables of both Houses of Parliament were speedily covered with petitions, signed by all classes, in almost every department

of industry, depicting their distresses, and beseeching the legislature to devise and apply a remedy; and in the Houses themselves, discussions of the most serious nature immediately arose, in which the national suffering was unhesitatingly ascribed to the blundering and dishonest legislation of former years, and a retracement of steps freely and fearlessly advocated. In Ireland the agitation was equal in amount, though in origin partly different. The gradual fall in the prices of every kind of grain was felt by the poor Irish farmer as well as by the English cultivator; but to this was superadded religious animosity of the most deplorable kind, to which the Emancipation Act of 1829 seemed only to have given double bitterness.

However mortifying this state of affairs must have been to the administration, it could not be wholly concealed nor ignored. The royal speech, accordingly, though it avoided all mention of the agitated state of Ireland, candidly admitted the prevalence of a distress too universal and notorious to be denied. After congratulating the Houses on the cessation of hostilities between the Czar and the Ottoman Porte, through a treaty which really set up the Czar's authority in the dominions of the Sultan, and literally ejected the Turks from two of their finest and most valuable provinces, Moldavia and Wallachia; and after lamenting the dissensions in Portugal, where the entire body of Portuguese lawyers had decided, and rationally decided, in favour of the claims of Don Miguel,* the

* When, on the occupation of Lisbon by the French under Junot, the royal family of Portugal fled to Brazil, Don Pedro, the eldest

speech from the throne expressed his Majesty's sorrow that, notwithstanding "the export, in the last year, of British produce and manufactures had exceeded that of any former year, distress should prevail amongst the agricultural and manufacturing classes in some parts of the United Kingdom." Neither the Duke of Wellington nor Mr Peel had then, it seems, learned a truth which has been demonstrated since that time; that is to say, that an excess of exports is often caused by domestic distress; the goods, unsaleable at home, being sent abroad.

The royal speech also went on to say that, "although the national income during the last year had not attained the full amount at which it had been estimated, the diminution was not such as to cause any doubt as to the future prosperity of the revenue;"—a sentence which appears to imply that ministers were well aware of another fact, of a somewhat paradoxical nature,—namely, that, under a system like that of England, a

son, became Emperor of Brazil; but on the absolute condition that "he should renounce, for himself and his heirs, all claim to the crown of Portugal;" in short, on the condition that, as far as Portugal was concerned, he should be politically dead. Don Pedro, however, applying this condition only to the male line, set up a claim for his daughter, Donna Maria; whilst the Portuguese lawyers decided the right to be with Don Miguel, the next brother to Pedro, as it would have been in the ordinary course, supposing Pedro to have died without any heirs. In this controversy, the "liberal" or "English party," sided with Donna Maria; whilst the priests, the lawyers generally, and the major part of the people, preferred Miguel; the church property here (as in Spain) being the great bone of contention.

monetary pressure tends, frequently, not to decrease the revenue, but to augment it. It is the tendency of the British financial system constantly to augment the floating capital in the hands of capitalists; and it is the tendency of a money-pressure to drive men to increase their business to meet the decline in prices and profits. To enable them to do this, the capital is advanced to the great merchant and enterprising manufacturer; and, in their employment of it, these last cannot choose but add to the revenue. For neither merchandise nor manufactures can be carried forward nor distributed without payment of additional wages; and under a heavy indirect taxation a full half of the workman's wages finds its way infallibly to the exchequer. And this process must necessarily go on until a commercial *zero* is reached. For, as additional goods must be thrown upon the market, to enable the manufacturer or merchant to meet the added wages, taxes, and other advances, which the extension of traffic renders requisite,—prices are by this very effort driven still lower, and a repetition of the process is thus brought about, year after year, until profit be attenuated to a shadow, and the stronger trader saves himself by thus ruining his weaker competitors.

In the temper in which the two Houses of Parliament met on the 4th February 1830, angry discussion could not long be avoided. By the measure of 1829 in favour of the Catholics, the great Tory party had been completely divided, and passion had now entirely taken the place of policy. It was soon ap-

parent that many members of the Tory party, who had acquiesced in the Act of 1819, were now, in order to harass Mr Peel, who in an evil hour had suffered his name to be attached to it, as if he were the originator of a measure in the concoction of which he really played a very subordinate part, ready to take advantage of the deep distress which the working of that Act was now creating, and to throw blame on all concerned in carrying out the measure. But, whilst the Tory party was thus severed and set against itself, the opposition was hourly gaining strength.

The advocates of an efficient and searching reform of the system of parliamentary representation had never, whilst the country had moderate ease, been strong enough to shake any ministry; but this was no longer the case. A considerable number of men of talent, both within and without the walls of Parliament, who had never countenanced the party-views of the old Whig opposition, now joined them upon the common platform of parliamentary reform,—being convinced that nothing short of the energy of a popular House of Commons would ever be equal to the arduous task of curing the gigantic mischiefs of the fatal Act of 1819; and being also convinced that no risk, thus incurred, could be really equal to the misery and mischief of suffering that injustice to continue without redress and without alleviation. To this reforming party the success of Mr O'Connell's agitation had given vast confidence; and to their numbers the pervading distress throughout the community was daily adding many men who had before feared the question

of reform as one of disguised revolution, but who now looked at it as the only refuge from ruin left them. The old Whig party, who had sometimes advocated reform and sometimes shelved it, as it happened to suit the exigence of the hour, were not slow to take advantage of this position of things. Of the policy of the rash Act of 1819, their more consistent and venerable leader, Earl Grey, had not only all along entertained, but had manfully expressed, very great doubt; but in the passing of the measure the Whig party were fully as deeply implicated as were their Tory competitors. No one could deny this, and no one did deny it: but this did not act as a motive to prevent the Whig party from availing themselves of the discontent and disaffection caused by this suicidal act to ruin their political adversaries. With this end in view, they now fomented the agitation for a parliamentary reform, which became louder and louder every hour; and in this movement they were not only assisted by the more extreme party of radical reformers, English and Irish, headed by Sir Francis Burdett and Daniel O'Connell, but, *mirabile dictû*, also by the Marquis of Blandford, General Gascoyne, and others of the extreme anti-catholic Tory party.

Having met in this temper, the two Houses were not tardy in their exhibition of the bitter feelings of hostility to the administration now entertained so widely. In the House of Lords, an amendment to the address in answer to the speech from the throne was moved by Earl Stanhope, in a speech of great asperity. In the course of this pungent address,

Lord Stanhope strongly asserted the universality of the distress now prevailing, and as unhesitatingly ascribed the whole to the rash and fatal legislation of 1819. In this onslaught upon the ministry he was ably backed by Lord Carnarvon; and, sooth to say, this was a topic with regard to which no men could be more unprepared to answer than were (with the exception of Mr Peel) the existing cabinet.

From the very first, the high Tory party, as it existed during the earlier period of the war, disliked and vehemently distrusted the whole growing sect of political economists. Unhappily, however, although this distrust was, in many points of view, not without foundation, such men as Perceval, Vansittart, Eldon, and Wellington, contenting themselves with distrusting, neglected to make themselves at all events sufficiently acquainted with the young and in most parts imperfect science, to enable them to give plausible answers to the diatribes of its professors. A perfect knowledge of all the phenomena of circulating money is attainable by ordinary intellects, though seldom attained; and, had the Duke of Wellington been aware of this truth, he would, by a little inquiry, have avoided the ridiculous assertion with which he met the complaints of Lords Stanhope and Carnarvon. In reply to the asseveration that Mr Peel's Act was causing the pressure complained of, the Duke actually went so far as to assert that the money in circulation at that moment was, notwithstanding the low and declining markets, equal to the highest amount when the paper money was in its most de-

preciated state! He might as well have asserted that, when the thermometer stood at 32°, the temperature was the same as when it rose to 64°. The assertion, however, was made; and, to prove it, the noble Duke produced the following extraordinary comparative statement:—

Highest Amount during Bank Restriction.

Bank of England notes, . .	£30,000,000
Country bank notes, . . .	23,000,000
Gold, ...	11,000,000
Silver, ...	7,000,000
	£64,000,000

Amount in Circulation in 1829.

Bank of England notes, . .	£19,900,000
Country bank notes, . . .	9,200,000
Gold, ...	28,000,000
Silver, ...	8,000,000
	£65,100,000

Making every allowance for the increase of commercial transactions, and of the population up to 1830, it is utterly impossible that, with such a circulation, the fall in prices now in progress could have occurred to so great an extent, supposing the estimate to be in itself credible. But it is a preposterous statement on the face of it. To obtain £28,000,000 in gold, the Duke must have taken the whole coinage since 1819, and assumed it to be current, without deduction for exportation, and the sums locked up in the tills of bankers, discounters, and merchants. The

gold in circulation in 1829 could only be to such extent as was absolutely necessary to replace the notes under £5, which would have been in circulation but for the Act of 1819. The bank, however, never had, at any period, more than *nine millions* of this paper out; and, if we take the country small notes at the same sum, this is far short of £28,000,000, whilst it is as much as can possibly be allowed. The statement as to silver coin is equally fallacious,—the probability being that not more than half of that amount was ever current at one and the same period.

This unfortunate attempt at economical calculation on the part of the military minister, of course became the source of some amusement to those who had any knowledge of such matters. Elsewhere, it had no effect of any kind; nor did the assertion of over-production, as an excuse for the continuous fall of prices universally over the kingdom, fare much better. The grain crops were known to be under average, nor was it easy to see why the home-market for fabrics should be more over-burdened than usual, when it was said, in the same breath, that "exports" were beyond all former precedent.* The amendment was, of course,

* Shortly after this, Lord Eldon exhibited another instance of the exceeding want of knowledge amongst the High Tory leaders of all relating to the vital question of currency. Some person having observed that fewer complaints of distress came from Northumberland than from the other counties, Lord Eldon absolutely attributed the exemption to "the Scotch small notes," which, he said, "circulated on the English side of the Border!" He seemed to be totally unaware that, unless a regular course of exchange

negatived; but it was a significant fact that the Dukes of Cumberland, Newcastle, and Richmond; the Earls of Stanhope, Tankerville, Winchilsea, and Radnor; and Lords Rivers and Northwich, divided in favour of it.

In the House of Commons a scene was enacted,—similar in nature, but very dissimilar, if the composition of the amendments proposed, and of the speeches by which they were supported, be taken into consideration. The address was moved by Lord Darlington, and seconded by Mr Ward; after which, Sir Edward Knatchbull, one of the high Tory party, proposed an amendment, merely to the effect that the distress complained of was universal, and not partial, which was seconded by Sir John Brydges. To Sir John Brydges succeeded Mr Western, who, in a short but bitter speech, attacked violently the conduct of ministers, who, he said, had put the national distress "into a parenthesis," and who, having ascribed the alarming state of affairs to the Act of 1819, described it as "one of the most mischievous measures that ever was devised for the destruction of a nation." After Mr Western rose Mr Protheroe (member for Evesham), who, after apologizing for his want of oratorical powers, and the difficulty he felt from not being in the habit of frequently addressing the House, pro-

could be established between Scotland and England,—making Scotland, thus far, a foreign country,—the value of money there must conform to that of English money, and Scottish prices rule in conformity with English prices. When that is the case, it cannot make any difference, excepting to the bankers only, whether payments be made in sovereigns or one-pound notes.

ceeded in a most uncompromising speech to attack the whole system of government; and concluded by moving a series of amendments, describing the effects of that system, especially as aggravated by the blunders and fatuities of the Economists in 1819.* Mr Protheroe's amendment was supported by Mr Alderman Waithman, who stated that he could vouch for the substantial truth of its allegations. To Mr Waithman succeeded Mr Edward Davenport, member for Shaftesbury, who again attributed the entire pressure to the operation of the Cash Payments Act, and exposed the utter absurdity of the statement of the Duke of Wellington, by contrasting it with an equally ridiculous allegation made by Mr Goulburn, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, on a former occasion. This he did as follows:—

* The following paragraphs form a part of the amendment of the honourable member for Evesham:—

"That the nation is bowed down by a weight of taxation which has been immoderately increased by laws effecting a change in the currency, made without a due consideration of the situation of the country, so that it is utterly unable to support the burden.

"That the people have a right to complain of the indecent and unjust continuance, in undiminished amount, of various grants, pensions, salaries, and allowances, which had been fixed or raised during the suspension of cash-payments, upon the express plea and justification of the depreciation in the value of money.

"That it is impossible for the people to view, without disgust, the mockery of their distress by a wasteful, blundering, and jobbing expenditure of public money, in the erection of palaces and public buildings in the metropolis, alike devoid of taste and utility."—*Hansard, New Series*, vol. xxii. p. 80.

"The expression in the royal speech was, that the distress was not of a *permanent* character. (Hear, hear, hear.) Now, he thought he could satisfy the House that the assertion was not worth one farthing! In 1828, when the Chancellor of Exchequer was told of the danger that would ensue from the withdrawal of one-pound notes, he stated their amount at £2,500,000, —a statement entirely erroneous. An individual had written to him on the subject, and stated that, on examination, he found that four-fifths of those notes had been out three years, and considerably above one-half of them had been out seven years; he therefore inferred that the amount was £7,000,000 or £8,000,000, instead of £2,500,000. * * * * * * He knew that the noble duke at the head of the government entertained very singular ideas of the position of the country. He had said that the extravagant system that prevailed during the war must be given up (hear), and moderate and sober habits must be re-introduced. (Hear, hear, hear.) Now, sober habits, he (Mr Davenport) admitted, were very laudable and good things; but let the sobriety and retrenchment be extended to all,—to ministers, to sinecurists, to every man or woman who lived upon the taxes. (Hear, hear, hear.) If

> "Order and sobriety
> Are the rules of his society!"

why not make them universal? (Loud laughter, and cheers.) In many parts of the country, he could tell the noble duke, the people were sober enough to satisfy anybody; for—they were now reduced to potatoes and water. (Hear, hear.) This noble duke ought to recollect or be reminded that these sober people had each clubbed his mite to present *him* with the most splendid (he did not say extravagant) reward ever given to a fortunate soldier! But he (Mr Davenport) doubted whether they would have granted this £700,000, if they had thought that he would, in return, have supported laws the effect of which

was to double the gift! Much was talked about "national credit" (hear, hear); and he must be allowed to observe, in conclusion, that with respect to this self-same "national credit," we had at present *two species of debts.* There was the debt which the government borrowed, and that which Mr Peel's bill, by doubling the real debt, had superadded. (Cheers and laughter.) The first would be paid, but the second never would be (hear, hear), never could be, and never ought to be paid."

Mr Alderman Thompson bore testimony to the deep distress which pervaded every interest; but he declined to support any amendment, as he still had confidence in the prudence and good intentions of ministers. Sir John Sebright supported the amendment, being convinced the nation was in a critical state. The Chancellor of the Exchequer contended that the pressure was not universal. He asserted that "if the honourable baronet (Sir Edward Knatchbull) would examine the agricultural state of Ireland, he would find it prosperous." (Hear and a laugh.) Mr Maberly in reply asserted the pressure to exist everywhere; but added, he could cure it by a safe paper currency.

Mr O'Connell said that "the Chancellor of Exchequer's discovery of Irish prosperity—a sort of oasis in the desert—was extraordinary indeed. He had lately come from Ireland, and a discovery more astonishing he certainly never heard in his life. (Laughter and cheers). Was it not the truth that there were seven thousand registered persons, in Dublin alone, actually starving *on three half-pence a-day?*" The honourable gentleman then went on to observe,

that "the Chancellor of the Exchequer had pledged himself and the government against entertaining any measure for depreciating the currency. Be it so. But he must tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer that they could not adhere to that pledge without diminishing the taxation of the country, not by candle-ends and cheese-pairings, but by millions after millions. (Hear, hear, hear!) Mr O'Connell concluded by saying, that "he looked forward to a growing distress, in one point of view, even with satisfaction! Why? because he was convinced it would now force the people to raise their voice aloud and demand a radical and complete reform. (Hear, hear, hear!) That must and would follow—and he was glad to make this confession of his political creed, for from the people he came, and they sent him there to do the work of the people." (Cheers.) Mr Huskisson, who followed Mr O'Connell, concurred with him in supporting the amendment, upon the ground that it described the state of the country better than the original address.* This storm of discontent and disapprobation

* In the course of his speech on this occasion, which speech was remarkable in more ways than one, the right honourable gentleman made use of an expression which proves how imperfectly the science of money and currency was at that time known, even by those who professed to be most versed in it. "Some gentlemen (said Mr Huskisson) attributed the distress to a supposed deficiency in the *currency*—a proposition which he thought it would be difficult to maintain, for we now saw *money* more abundant in this metropolis than at any former period." At this distance of time, it seems strange to see a man of Mr Huskisson's reputation unable to make the distinction between "currency," or circulating medium, and "money

at length called up Mr Secretary Peel, upon whom devolved the almost hopeless task of persuading the House that vital change, now making in the value of the circulating money of the country, the effect of which was absolutely to double the entire weight of the existing taxation, had little to do with the distress complained of. It is no reflection upon the talents of Mr Peel to confess that he failed in this really forlorn attempt. To quote, as the right honourable Secretary did, an increase in Canal dues, as a proof of prosperity, was futile; as everybody knew that, when profits decrease, men extend their operations to preserve their station in society. The breach of treaty with Turkey Mr Peel did not attempt to defend. It was notorious that, under the provisions of the treaty at Adrianople, Greece was left nominally subject to the Sultan. Yet, in defiance of this, the western powers leagued with Russia to separate Greece from the Ottoman empire; thus weakening the weak and strengthening the strong.

On the sore subject of the rash Act of 1819, Mr Peel made the following avowal:—

"He would say upon this occasion that he was ready to abandon his opinions respecting the currency, to which he was

or floating capital. The deficiency of the first was, in fact, the cause of the comparative glut of the last. When, owing to a deficient circulating medium, prices fell so as at last to destroy profits, merchants ceased to borrow floating capital to carry on an unprofitable trade; and hence capitalists were fain to invest in Exchequer Bills at 2½ per cent. interest, and 75s. premium, having no other means of disposing of their money.

supposed to be so unalterably pledged, if he could bring himself to believe that his so doing would be productive of any real and permanent benefit to the interests of the country. (Hear, hear, hear!) It was no imputation on the part of a public man to recede from opinions which he had maintained, when he found others better adapted to the circumstances of the country. From his experience of public life, he was never more convinced of anything than of the arrogance of binding oneself to any set of opinions on matters of this nature. (Hear, hear, hear!) To him it appeared much better to act upon the principle avowed by the honourable baronet who proposed the amendment, and to look at every measure solely with reference to its merits, uninfluenced by ties of mere party or by any preconceived opinions on the subject. (Hear.) He would adopt that principle. He should be always ready to abandon opinions when proved to be wrong. And on the contrary he should support such only as he believed to be right. He repeated, he could see no derogation in a change of opinions or sentiments, on the part of any public man, when he receded from those he had maintained, because the interests of the country plainly called upon him to do so. Now with regard to this question of currency, after the best deliberation which his Majesty's ministers could give to the subject, they were determined to adhere to the present system; being convinced that, *if any error had been committed in establishing that system*, we should only be exposed to still greater evils than those we *had suffered*, by again doing anything to unsettle the currency of the country." (Hear, hear, hear!)

Such was the avowal of Mr Peel on this *vexata questio*. It consists of assertion and inference only. By making use of the past tense "had suffered" the Secretary plainly inferred that the suffering and injustice were temporary only: but this can never be admitted by any one who really understands this

matter and has moral courage equal to his logic. Where a nation is made to pay, annually, thirty millions, instead of the fifteen millions which might be demanded with some show of justice, every year must aggravate the injury, and add to the deterioration, slow and imperceptible but unceasing and disastrous, with which an injustice so gigantic must afflict society.

Equally unhappy was the right honourable Secretary's allusion to the distress then apparent in the United States. Upon the maritime cities and manufacturing districts of these States commercial distress in Great Britain must of necessity act; inasmuch as the fabrics, which the home demand refuses to take, are, for the greater part, exported to America, and sold there, at all hazards, to the great injury of their native manufactures. But this was only a partial cause. Mr Peel ought to have known, and to have given the House credit for knowing, that President Jackson was, at that very period, commencing that conflict with the United States Bank which ended in the destruction of that establishment, but which, in its progress, caused enormous commercial and agricultural vicissitude in the United States. In fact the Northern States were then beginning to afford a parallel to Great Britain. In order to stop the designs of the President, who, he knew, would refuse to renew the charter of the bank, Biddle, the manager, reckless of the ruin he was so involving, suddenly hesitated to discount, and diminished his paper circulation. The result was, there as here, a fatal depression of prices and widely-spread distress, especially in the commercial cities. The after effects

upon England of the President's struggle with the makers of paper-money in the American United States shall be noted at the proper period. In the meantime, it is only necessary to remark, that Mr Peel's allusion was remarkably ill-timed as well as ill-judged, telling as it really did against himself. After a few sentences from Mr Brougham, who unwillingly voted for the amendment of Sir Edward Knatchbull, the House divided, and it was negatived by 53 votes only; 105 being for it and 158 against it. The result sufficiently demonstrated that the suffering into which the country was now plunged, was unquestionably sapping the strength of the ministry. To move an amendment on such an occasion, was not a usual course; but a division, so powerful, in its favour was a symptom not to be mistaken.

It was now sufficiently apparent that the administration would, throughout the session, be the subject of a series of attacks from which it could hardly escape without incurring a greater or less amount of damage. It had three distinct parties with which to contend, none of which could be safely despised. There was in the van the old Whig opposition, now in high spirits, and expectant of a change of circumstances in their favour. Next came the opponents of the monetary measures of 1819, to whose remonstrances and gloomy predictions the pervading pressure was giving more and more of strength and effect; and, lastly, there were the discontented spirits of the old Tory party, who were now driven by vexation and disappointment to join the other enemies of the ministry. By

this united opposition a reform in the representation was now demanded. By the Whigs it was advocated because they clearly saw it was their best trump-card. By such men as the Marquis of Blandford, Lord Winchilsea, and Mr Western it was demanded, because they saw no hope for the triumph of their peculiar opinions, save in a parliament more popularly constructed. It was well known to the whole of them that to the slightest measure of reform of this description neither Premier nor Secretary would give any countenance; and it was equally manifest that a denial on their part would now very greatly add to their growing want of popularity. No time was accordingly lost by the enemies of the administration in attacking them at a point so difficult to defend, and so easily assailed. Nor will the candid inquirer deny, after due reflection, that it was a question really full of practical difficulties; nor be inclined too severely to blame those who, probably unwisely, concluded it the safest course to resist the introduction of the principle into the practice of government.

Like all reforms too long delayed, the danger of effecting it had been aggravated in the *ratio* of the delay. Since the time of Henry VI., when the county franchise was limited to the freeholders of forty shillings per annum and upwards, the representation had been nearly left untouched, save by the great innovator, Time. The usage under the Plantagenets had, no doubt, been to call upon prosperous boroughs, unrepresented, to send burgesses to Parliament, but after the accession of the arbitrary Tudors, this usage was either abused or was

suffered to drop into desuetude.* So little was the value of the franchise appreciated in these earlier times, that small boroughs sometimes begged to be excused from sending burgesses to save the cost of paying them; and thus amidst ignorance, indifference, and selfishness, the representative system, which had grown up and flourished from and after the reign of Henry III., was suffered to drop into a comparative abeyance. The consequence was that, by the operation of the innovator, Time, the ancient representative fabric became full of anomalies. Commercial changes caused ancient boroughs to decay, and new unrepresented populous towns to arise, until at last a few wealthy families really returned a majority of the elective legislature, and the ancient power of the crown as well as that of the people became merged in that of a territorial and moneyed aristocracy, over whom the press and public opinion exercised an irregular control. To make alterations, however slight, in an

* One of the latest instances of original writs is the case of the county and city of Durham, neither of which, prior to 1640, the county being a county palatine, and as such accounted a separate independent jurisdiction, had sent members to Parliament. After the imprisonment of Bishop Morton, however, and the dissolution of the see, both county and city were obliged, by writ, to send members to Cromwell's Parliaments; the county sending two, and the city or borough one. This they did unwillingly; but after the Restoration were allowed to send members on their own petition. Up to this period, the county had always put in pleas of exemption, even from the King's levies of men on emergencies; stating as the ground that they were "haly-wark-folk," and "within St Cuthbert's patrimony;" and being specially charged with the defence of the border, ought not to be called on for miscellaneous or ordinary services.

edifice so circumstanced, was evidently an enterprise at once delicate and dangerous; and if that danger was magnified by Mr Peel and his colleagues, as unquestionably was the case, the error is not such as to afford matter either for astonishment or blame. In the altered system of representation were to be found the concentrated consequences of the errors and crimes, politically speaking, of the Tudors, of the Stuarts, and of the Long Parliament; as well as of the shortcomings of the Whig revolutionists of 1688; and few will deny that they who undertook to repair the dilapidations of centuries, would stand in need of all caution and all courage.

The united opposition were not tardy in commencing their onslaught. On the 11th February, Mr N. Calvert having asked leave to bring in a bill to cure the corruption of the borough of East Retford by extending the franchise to the adjoining hundred of Bassetlaw, Lord Howick moved an amendment to the effect, that instead of bringing in bills to cure particular instances of bribery, it would be better for Parliament to entertain some general measure of reform; Mr Tennyson having first moved an amendment that, instead of the hundred of Bassetlaw, the franchise should be taken from East Retford and given to the great, rich, and populous town of Birmingham. Thus, two measures were before the House; one to give Birmingham members; the other to affirm the necessity of a general reform of the representation.

The proposal of transferring the East Retford franchise to the great and populous town of Birming-

ham was ably advocated, to the deep chagrin of the ministers, by Mr Huskisson. The right honourable gentleman warned his former colleagues to watch and consult the signs of the times. He insisted upon it that, in this as in other matters, public opinion was the only safe guide for such a government as that of Great Britain; and he distinctly told them that, if in this instance they set it at defiance, the result would be disastrous both to them and to the principles they professed to advocate. He urged them to contemplate and reflect upon the claims of the great town of Birmingham; to read attentively the proceedings of the people of that influential and wealthy emporium; to take into consideration the influence of the political union of Birmingham, headed by a man of great energy and also great talent (Mr Thomas Attwood, afterwards member for Birmingham); and to remember that it was a close copy of the Catholic Association of Ireland. Mr Huskisson asked the ministers if they would wish to see Mr Attwood, and the now strong party of radical reformers, exercising in England the power of the member for Clare in Ireland? (Hear, hear, hear, on all sides of the House.) Would they wish to see this union of extreme reformers overspread all England, as the Catholic Association once overrode all Ireland? (Cheers.) It was because he (Mr Huskisson) was most sincerely opposed to all schemes of wild or sweeping reform that he besought the ministers to yield to a rational, a practical, and most moderate request. Birmingham had a right, a moral right, to be especially represented (hear, hear);

and, if he must speak out, he would rather see Mr Thomas Attwood sitting side by side on the same bench with the honourable member for Clare, than agitating all England, from the central union at Birmingham, with schemes of reform which he (Mr Huskisson) would never sanction. (Hear, hear, hear.) Such was the substance of this able and really wise address. It was immediately replied to, but in a very different spirit, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Goulburn), who twitted Mr Huskisson with being a conservative in profession, but an innovator in practice. He said, were this yielded, no man could predict when and where demands of this nature would stop.

After a speech from Mr Charles Grant in support of Mr Huskisson's view, the cries of "Question" becoming loud, Mr Peel rose to oppose the amendments. This he did upon the ground that, as only a small portion of the electors of East Retford had been proved to have received bribes, to disfranchise the borough would be to punish the innocent for the guilty. He should, therefore, vote for the ordinary course in such cases,—which was to throw the borough open to the adjoining hundred. The right honourable secretary defended his vote for disfranchising Penryn, and transferring the franchise to Manchester, on the ground that the majority there were proved to be corrupt; in which case alone would he consent to any transfer of franchise to a more populous place. On a division taking place, there appeared for the original motion 126; for the amendment by Mr Tennyson, 99,—leaving a majority of 27 only. On

a review of all the circumstances, it seems probable that the ill-judged and impolitic resistance of Mr Peel to the moderate proposal of Mr Tennyson really sealed the fate of the ministry, and mainly contributed to that doom which an extraordinary combination of events brought upon them a few months afterwards. The ground taken by the Secretary demonstrated that reform of the representation, even to the trifling extent of giving representatives to half-a-dozen or a dozen populous towns, was not to be expected at the hands of this administration.

The Penryn vote of Mr Peel really passed for nothing; for, if the franchise was only to be transferred in cases where a majority of electors could be proved to have been bribed, this amounted to a virtual bar to all effective reform. Such cases must, as a matter of course, be "like angels' visits,—few and far between." By this step, the hopes excited by the frank though tardy accordance of Catholic relief were at once dashed to the earth; and the nation, now groaning under the monetary pressure, and bent upon change, was thus steeled and nerved for a final assault upon the government, whenever circumstances should give it the power to assault with success.

It now became the tactics of the Opposition to press the question of reform on Parliament in every possible shape,—not under the hope of making much impression upon the existing House of Commons, but with a view to keep the public mind in a perpetual state of excitement upon this vital question. In pursuance of this plan of political warfare, on the 18th February

the Marquis of Blandford moved for leave to bring in a bill "to amend the representation." This he did in an address of much ability; and, had the measure which he proposed been planned with equal policy, it must have produced a deep effect at this juncture upon the public mind. The objectionable part of the scheme of the noble Marquis was not in its details, which in many respects were similar to the provisions which soon after became law. The bill of the Marquis of Blandford was, in fact, in much that it proposed, similar to the measure of 1832. It had its "Schedule A," into which were doomed to be put all such close boroughs as were deemed incurable. With regard to the larger boroughs, it was expected that, by giving votes to all householders paying tax or rate, they would be rendered independent of external influences. In the counties, copy-holders and leaseholders were, under certain limitations, to have the franchise. The Septennial Act was also to be repealed, as well as the law requiring qualifications for eligibility to sit in Parliament; and members were, as in more ancient periods, to be paid for their time by means of an assessment for that special purpose.

The objectionable feature of the bill was, that it left the whole minutiæ to a committee of twenty-one members of the House of Commons, who were to be bound by oath to do justice in their inquiries, and to make equitable returns of all particulars demanded at their hands, but upon whose reports the Houses were to proceed to legislate,—a delegation of power too sweeping to be consented to by any deliberative body.

After a smart debate, in the course of which Mr Hobhouse, Mr Bennett, Sir Francis Burdett, Lord Howick, and others of the reforming party spoke, less in favour of the actual bill—to bring in which leave was asked—than for reform in general, as now inevitable, Mr Peel opposed the measure. As it was next to impossible to broach a new argument on a question so often debated, the right honourable Secretary was fain to content himself with such common-places as were current on the side that he espoused. He defended the decayed boroughs upon the ground that they afforded seats easily obtainable by men of slender incomes, but of great talents, and affected to wonder at Sir Francis Burdett's assertion that the greatest talents became either useless or dangerous when made thus subservient to an interested patron. Mr Peel also professed to be scandalized at the idea of paying members of Parliament, as was the ancient usage in England, and is still so in the United States; calculating that, in such case, the House of Commons would cost the country £250,000 *per annum!**

Mr O'Connell, who spoke after Mr Peel, answered this part of the honourable Secretary's argument; pointed to the debt of £800,000,000, which, he said, would never have been contracted by a reformed and free parliament, paid by and only dependent on their constituents; and that it was better honestly to pay members, as was done in other countries, than suffer

* One hundred thousand pounds less than is, at this moment, paid for printing only the reports, votes, &c., &c., of the two Houses!

them to pay themselves by means of sinecure places, superfluous offices, and every species and grade of jobbery. The debate was concluded by Mr Brougham recommending and Lord Althorp proposing an amendment, in general terms, stating a reform was now necessary,—which, being lost, the original motion was also negatived without a division.

On the 23d of February, Lord John Russell returned to the attack. He first presented a petition from the town of Sheffield, in Yorkshire, complaining that whilst divers large, populous, and wealthy towns and cities were unrepresented, numbers of places nearly destitute of inhabitants, and of no account whatever or mark, save as being very conspicuously corrupt, were allowed to send members to parliament. This was done only as a prelude to the main assault. After the petition was received and ordered to be printed, Lord John, after moving that three orders of the day relative to bills for transferring the franchises of three boroughs proved to be corrupt to Leeds, Birmingham, and Manchester, should be read by the clerk at the table, went on to propose that members should be forthwith given to these great towns. Lord John commenced with the following significant warning, which, had they treated with more attention, it would have been well for the great party to whom he was opposed,—

"I cannot, Sir, but think (said the noble lord) that, if some members of his Majesty's government feel an objection to my motion, it would yet be wiser, on the whole, if they were *not* to array themselves as a body against a proposition of this

nature. It is a proposition that will tend to bring into this House persons representing large classes of the population, and bearing a large proportion of the public burdens; and I cannot help thinking that it will be imprudent to array the whole army of ministerial influence against a proposal so seasonable and so moderate. There is an old quotation from Lord Bacon's works which has often been heard within the walls of this House, and which tells us that 'time is the great innovator.' If Lord Bacon had lived in the present day, he might have changed his maxim, and said, 'Taxation is the great innovator!' Persons who bear great burdens are apt to look into them and to demand their causes, and satisfy themselves that the government which imposes them is carried on with the strictest integrity, and with a large and liberal purpose,—which, perhaps, if less grievously taxed, they might not think of requiring. The people now look with far more suspicion to the motives of this House than at any former time. They always must, in fact, look with uneasy suspicion on the deeds of a government, when its burdens weigh heavily on them, and when they who bear have no voice in the imposition of the taxes that are to be borne. (Hear, hear, hear.) Such are the reasons that induce me to go to the motion I now venture to make. I now shortly state its extent. It is to ask leave to bring in a bill to enable the towns of Leeds, of Manchester, and of Birmingham, to send members to this House. (Cheers.) I do not intend such representations to be a permanent, but only a temporary, addition to the members of this Assembly; I intend to insert in the bill a clause by which, if any borough is hereafter disfranchised, the prerogative vested in the crown may be suspended until three boroughs shall have been disfranchised, and the number of members so reduced to the same amount as at present. Such, Sir, is a simple statement of the bill I mean to introduce. With regard to the amount of qualification, I shall propose it to be somewhere between £10 and £20 a-year."

This motion, like that for transferring the franchise of East Retford to Birmingham, was strongly supported, and with the exception of Mr Peel, feebly opposed. Amongst the other supporters of Lord John Russell were General Gascoygne, and also Mr Huskisson, who gave it as his decided opinion, looking at the signs of the times, that the period was not far distant when ministers must come down to the House, and themselves propose some such measure. Mr Peel opposed it, because it introduced a principle into the system of representation, that of mere numbers, which he said was the ultra-democratic principle, and with which the aristocratic and monarchical principle could not long co-exist. Once introduce *numbers* as the test, and no man could say at what they would stop. Mr Peel even went so far as to say (a strange assertion) that, in the past history of England, no trace of this democratic principle of representation could be found. Once adopt it, he argued, and give members to these towns on the argument solely of population, and no man could draw the line where this course was to stop. Sheffield and Halifax would put in as plausible a claim as Leeds. So might Wolverhampton. (Hear, hear, hear!) Mr Peel concluded by saying that the House had no power legally to add to their numbers, as that would violate the stipulations of the Union with Scotland which fixed the relative numbers. After a powerful speech from Mr Brougham in answer to Mr Peel, the house divided, when there appeared for the motion 140; against it 188; majority adverse 48.

In the month of March, this system of exciting the

public mind, on the now paramount question of representative reform, was renewed in another and a still more exasperating form. On the 1st day of that month, Mr Poulett Thompson, then member for Dover, rose to present a petition from the town of Newark-upon-Trent, complaining of the interference of the Duke of Newcastle in the elections for that borough. The substantial statement of the petition was, that the Pelham family secured their influence over the voters of the borough less through means of property, absolutely and in fee-simple their own, than through their possession of lands adjacent which they held as lessees under the crown. The petitioners complained that Michael Thomas Sadler, Esq., the sitting member, was returned instead of Mr Sergeant Wilde, through the terror caused amongst the voters of being ejected from their holdings of these crown lands by the Duke of Newcastle if they voted for the learned sergeant. The petition then went on to aver that, in fact, after the election, forty notices to quit were served on persons who had resisted the ducal influence; and that one of these persons having assured the agent that his vote was given by mistake, the Duke's steward replied "then the notice to quit is a mistake." The petitioners further alleged, that a public meeting being called to petition parliament as to this interference, notice of such intention was sent to his Grace of Newcastle, who, however, refused to give any explanation further than by a note, in which he said that "he had a right to do what he liked with his own." The petitioners in conclusion offered

to prove all the facts before a committee of the House, and besought the House to address the crown in the meantime not to renew the lease of these crown lands, but to sell or otherwise dispose of the same; asserting that they were so managed, to preserve the duke's influence over the tenants, as to preclude all improvements, tenants being constantly in dread of ejectments and the lands being all let from year to year.

This petition was well calculated to produce, and in company with the debate which followed, unquestionably did produce, a powerful effect upon the public mind, now sensitively alive as to the state of the representation. It is true that, after the disgraceful termination of the disastrous and ill-advised conflict with the North American colonists, projects of representative reform had been entertained by persons of name, amongst whom was the younger Pitt; but for centuries the mass of the nation had been fatally regardless and apathetic as to a subject in its own nature abstract and remote. Whilst the country continued moderately prosperous; whilst all were employed at fair wages, and the task of finding a livelihood for a family was comparatively easy; whilst profits were still certain and sufficient, and competition reasonable, the English people, true to their practical and unreflective character, looked no further; and substantially realizing the licentious description of the poet Otway, in his Tragedy of "Venice Preserved," had refused to let abstract questions interfere with solid comforts and mere animal enjoyments. This lethargic state had

now, however, arrived at its end. After a long struggle, the press had now attained a degree of freedom never before known in England; and to the representations of that press, suffering had now begun to teach the people to listen. The result was, that this frank declaration by the Duke of Newcastle that he regarded the electors of Newark as so much stock upon a farm, which half a century before would have been treated as a blunt joke, now roused a cry of indignation from one end of the country to the other—a feeling which the circumstances of the debate were not of a nature to allay.

Mr Sadler, an amiable and in some respects an accomplished man, was the member whom the Duke had assisted the electors of Newwark to choose, and upon Mr Sadler a part of the wrath of Mr Poulett Thomson, who presented the petition, accordingly fell. This gentleman had taken a very prominent and a very proper part in exposing to the world the arbitrary conduct of the mill-owners of Yorkshire and Lancashire towards their poor weavers and spinners. From a book, written by Mr Sadler on this subject, Mr Thomson extracted the following pithy passage: "The usual justification of these proprietors,—'May we not do what we will with our own?'—I shall not pause here to discuss; but will merely observe. that it has been made the apology for more cruelty and oppression than all the other excuses put together." This Mr Thomson asserted was just as true of the conduct of such landlords as his Grace of Newcastle. The possession of this ill-applied property by the Pelhams,

Mr Thomson characterized as "a rank job." It had been let by a former Duke of Newcastle, when Prime Minister in 1760, to the Earl of Lincoln for £36 per annum. Since 1806, the present duke paid for it £2060 yearly. But he was supposed to receive £3500 a-year from it; and, were it not abused for his election-purposes, it would yield much more. Lord Lowther and Mr Clinton denied some of the statements of the petitioners. Sir Francis Burdett supported the petition, of the substantial truth of which he said there need be no doubt. The noble duke had complained of him (Sir F. Burdett) in a published letter, for applying to him the term "borough-monger." In reply, he could only say that, if so, he had done it in no obnoxious sense. (Hear, hear.) In the present vicious state of the system, he regarded the open traffic in seats as a palliation and not an aggravation of its evils. It sometimes let into the House men who really wished to serve their country. This it seems was his own case. (Hear and a laugh.) When a very young man, barely of age, his friends, and not himself, wished he should sit in parliament; and one fine morning, to his astonishment, he got a letter telling him that he was elected by the free and independent electors of Boroughbridge. (A laugh.) That was his first appearance there. The noble duke was then a young man too—probably as innocent of mischief as he was. All he knew was, that he paid him £4000 for the seat—no high price, considering it was guaranteed to him against all chances for six years! Sir Francis

concluded by saying, that though the duke was less to blame than the system, yet the House ought for the sake of their own character and privilege entertain the petition and grant a committee to inquire. Mr Sadler defended the Duke of Newcastle as a kind landlord and kind master. He (Mr Sadler) was proud of the confidence he placed in him. "The noble duke, he must repeat, contrary to all that had been said of 'dictation,' had *left him*, as a representative of the people, to promote and secure their interests according to his own judgment." Mr Hobhouse supported the petition, and observed that the honourable member's own admission that the duke "allowed him to vote as he pleased," proved that the duke put him there, and could control him when there.

This warm encounter called up Mr Peel, who, with his usual astuteness, confined his defence to technicalities. He argued, that to grant the prayer of the petitioners for a committee would be simply absurd; for what right had any committee to inquire into the leases of his Grace the Duke of Newcastle? As for the rent paid by his Grace, he (Mr Peel) believed it was as much as any other person would be found to offer. (Hear, hear). Nor could the crown interfere as to the mode of subletting. The duke surely had the right to sublet on what terms he deemed the most advisable. As for the seven individuals who had been served with notice to quit (cries "forty, not seven")—well, seven only it seems are actually ejected. But how could any committee possibly ascertain that these ejectments were for the reason the petitioners –

chose to infer? It was quite impossible to bring proof of the *animus* of a transaction of this sort. If it were really the aim of the petitioners to have this election inquired into, why did they not petition against the return of the honourable member for Newark? The House could try that question by a committee. But they were no tribunal between the Duke of Newcastle and his tenants. They could not even try such a question on oath; and if they adopted any such inquiry, the case, no doubt, would be transferred to some court where it could, if tried at all, be legally tried. Mr Peel then argued upon the dangerous nature of this sort of public interference between landlords and tenants. It cut many ways. Was it to be endured that, if once a tenant voted in opposition to his landlord, he was to be supported by the public and the House, though the landlord might have really the best and most unexceptionable ground for getting rid of that tenant? Mr Peel concluded by saying, that he was not ashamed to assert that a "moral influence" might be exerted by a landlord; that it might influence that tenant's vote; and that if it did, this influence was not unfair, and was (where landlords did their duty) inseparable from property. (Hear, hear.) On a division the House refused a committee by 194 against 61. Majority 133. The object of the petitioners, however, was fully answered by the result as it was. The popular feelings against the exercise of this species of election influence were materially strengthened; and against the Duke of Newcastle, personally, the prejudice became very

strong. In fact the unlucky phrase of having "a right to do what one likes with one's own" almost became a proverbial expression, to be applied whenever anything remarkably harsh or unjust was perpetrated.

These attacks, varied as they were, did not embrace the entire strategy of the opposition. The distress of the country was a text so very comprehensive, that under its shadow might be debated both the tendency of the rash measures of 1819, and the existing distress as exemplifying their effects. As in the present critical position of the harassed ministers no plan of sap or mine was to be neglected, this theme was again shaped into an appeal to the House of Commons; and on the 16th March, in accordance with this determination, Mr Edward Davenport moved for a committee to inquire into the general state of the country, and into the cause which had produced that state. In this debate, the whole perplexed question of the errors of 1819, and the embarrassments and complications consequent upon them, were again opened out. Mr Davenport accused the ministers of being quite conscious of the enormous injustice perpetrated, and perpetually perpetrating, since that disastrous era; adding the still heavier accusation that, in consequence of that consciousness, they doggedly refused all inquiry into sufferings which it was their duty, not only to understand and acknowledge, but to redress; and were backed in this unprincipled course by a set of ignorant followers, who hated a theme which they had neither the talent nor perseverance to

master. Upon this part of the question the opposition found a powerful auxiliary in Mr Sadler, the new member for Newark, who, though bitterly opposed to the reforming schemes of the whig and radical sections of the opposition, was just as stern a dissentient from Mr Peel's monetary tactics, and deprecated as deeply as any one the concessions to the Catholics of 1829. One portion of Mr Sadler's speech on this occasion was at once so beautiful and so true, that it is impossible to resist adorning the page in which it is alluded to, by quoting it. Alluding to the assertions of the pressure on industry being transient merely, Mr Sadler observed:—

"He might be disposed to believe with the honourable member for Bramber (Mr Irving) that, as compared with the winter months, there *was* an improvement. Spring was the seed-time; and if we were to be fed by the produce of our own fields, the agriculturists of England must now be at work. If we were to be clothed by our own manufacturers, this was the most favourable season for their toil. He was not so much surprised at the improvement as to find it so trifling; for, considering the season and the smallness of the various stocks on hand, the demand for labour was not urgent. (Hear, hear.) A spring without an increase of business would be like a spring without one bird or one flower. It sometimes happened, however, that the blights of spring were much more melancholy to behold than the barrenness of winter; and he was apprehensive that such a blight was upon the spring of our industry. The causes which had produced the winter of distress were all yet in operation, and would, he feared, still augment that distress which ministers had ventured only partially to deny. As long as the present policy was persisted in, he should anticipate little from any returning gleam of prosperity. Utterly hope-

less as he might be as to the final result, he must expect some such gleams from the convulsive struggles of an industrious people. (Hear, hear.) The dolphin was radiant in beauty in the hour of death. The retreating surge sometimes threw back a bold wave that almost touched its former height. But when the whole body of the waters was receding; when death had laid his iron hand on the denizen of the deep, a single wave or a single gleam of beauty could not restore life, nor carry back the ebbing waters to the top of the tide. (Hear, hear.) No country ever had its prosperity annihilated at once; and he saw, he confessed, in the alternations of prosperity and distress, only the fearful evidences of the violent struggle to avoid decay. * * * * * Gleams of prosperity were but the exacerbations of the slow and wasting disease which was preying on the vitals of the nation. An inquiry into the causes which had produced this alarming state of things was surely worthy of Parliament. There were some of them which he knew too well the House would be forbidden to explore (hear, hear, hear, and oh, oh), and these were precisely the causes which would be most interesting, for they were the sources of our disease."

The ground gone over during this protracted debate which lasted through four nights, was ground which had been so often trodden, that to particularize the sentiments of the speakers at any length would be useless. The government was principally defended by Mr Huskisson and by Mr Peel, both of whom deprecated the idea of a committee for general inquiry; and was attacked by Mr Matthias Attwood, Sir Richard Vyvian, Mr Hudson Gurney, Mr O'Connell, the Marquis of Blandford, General Gascoygne, and Sir Francis Burdett, all of whom declared that the House would desert its duty if it refused to inquire. The

defence made by Mr Huskisson and by Mr Peel consisted, first, in an attempt to deny the universality of the national difficulties, by showing an increase in savings-bank deposits, and an extension of some branches of business; secondly, in denying, as far as they could, that the fall of prices, which could not be explained away, was the sole consequence of the Cash-payment Act; and, lastly, in denying the possibility of an equitable adjustment of public contracts, because the original lenders could not be traced, and in describing, in strong terms, the great injustice, as well as peril, of again fostering the notion of salvation through a depreciated currency, whether convertible or inconvertible. It never seemed to occur to Mr Peel that to no species of securities does the common law maxim of "caveat emptor" apply so strongly as to paper-securities, which are variable in value in their own nature; and that, if the fall in prices after 1819 was *not* caused by the withdrawal of the bank-notes over all the country, the fact that the respite of the paper, from 1822 to 1826, raised them again, seems neither more nor less than an incomprehensible paradox, contradicting at once all reasoning and all experience.

After four nights of harassing debate, which was really meant to impress the public out of doors, Mr Davenport, whose motion was for "a committee of the whole House," wishing to avoid the division, proposed to withdraw it. The speaker, however, warning the House that, in such case, the result would be an avoidance of any recorded decision at all, Mr Peel suggested that the House should divide upon an

amendment "to make the committee a select committee," which was proposed by Sir Charles Burrell, but should do this with the understanding that by that division the whole question should be determined. On a division thus arranged, the committees were negatived by 255 against 87; the House being made to believe that questions otherwise interminable were thus closed. Upon the public the effect was the contrary; exasperation and not quietude was the result.

This series of assaults, of which the House of Peers was occasionally the theatre as well as that of the Commons, was only concluded on the 28th May, when Mr O'Connell brought before the House the question of universal suffrage, which, after a smart debate, in which it came out that the close-borough system had attained to a respectable maturity in the reign of the popular Queen Elizabeth, was negatived by 319 against 13.*

Events were, however, now nearly impending, which were sufficient in themselves, without being combined with the rapidly growing unpopularity of the administration, to work a great change in the

* In the 14th and 18th of Queen Elizabeth, Dame Mary Pakington, widow of Sir John Pakington, made a return of burgesses in these words:—"Know ye that I, Mary Pakington, have chosan, named, and appointed my trusty and well-beloved Thomas Lichfield, and George Burden, Esquires, to be my burgesses for my borough of Aylesbury." This unlucky return, which was quoted by Mr Robert Dundas, was closely copied at Appleby, in Westmoreland, for obvious purposes, in the course of the general election which soon after followed.

political position of the country. It was now known that the king was suffering under a complication of disorders, from which it was impossible that he could recover, and under the stress of which it was not probable he could for any length of time survive. He had himself for some years sedulously concealed from the eyes of the public the manifold infirmities which were gradually bringing him to his end. For fully seven years he had lived in a sort of retirement (the palisades and sentinels being screened by trees and shrubs) in the midst of Windsor Park, to which the ministers of state, and the companions alone of such pleasures as his jaded appetites enabled him to taste, were admitted. But in the spring of 1830, to such a state of entire prostration was he reduced, that it became necessary, as he could not now bear the fatigue of signing papers, to pass a short bill, enacting that the sign might be affixed by proxy by means of a stamp to be made for that purpose. This, of course, convinced the whole nation that a new reign was close at hand; and by so doing added to the weakness of the ministry, whom a general election was now sure to damage, and who would no longer be supported by a master as decidedly opposed to all reform as they themselves unquestionably were.

On the 26th of June 1830, died George the Fourth, at the castle of Windsor, which for a short period before his death he had again chosen to occupy. His life and character were not such as to induce a voluntary description of either from any writer who can consistently avoid touching upon them; and, as the

biographer of Sir Robert Peel's political life is under no such historical necessity, it is enough to say that he died little lamented, except by those who gained by administering to his pleasures, and that the news of his demise was only regarded with interest by his subjects, in so far as it involved the accession of a more popular successor. To the stability of the now tottering Peel and Wellington administration, it was universally felt that the death of the king was a heavy blow. The character of his successor was very dissimilar to that of the deceased monarch.

William the Fourth, up to this period known as Duke of Clarence, was also known to be of an easy, liberal, simple disposition; to be fond of popularity, but at the same time desirous of doing what was right; to be attached to and proud of his country, and most especially of her naval arm, with which he was connected; but not endowed with any deep political knowledge, nor much aware of the real causes of the unpopularity of his brother and of his brother's servants. For the sort of secluded state in which the late king's latter years were spent, he had no taste. His wish was to mix with his subjects; to see them happy and at ease; and above all, to know that the British nation was at once feared and respected by foreign governments. Of the intricacies of the system, to the care of which he had succeeded together with his crown, he knew nothing; and his succession to the throne having been only a distant presumption during most of his life, had never cared to know. Hence King William the Fourth came to the crown with simple

habits and good and patriotic intentions, but with no political knowledge, and with few of the pretensions and prejudices which so often imperil kings. He wished to be the popular king of a free and contented people; and, could a mere wish have achieved so blessed a distinction, he would have been so.

Mr Peel and his ducal colleague were, by this event, placed in a position at once arduous and painful. They had suddenly become the unpopular servants of a king whose wish it was to be popular—two positions so incompatible with each other as to ensure almost the speedy disruption of a union so unnatural. They had become the Tory ministers of a sovereign whose disposition led him to sympathize with subjects who only asked for a peaceable and rational reformation of abuses and anomalies, the existence of which was more or less acknowledged by almost every one but themselves. In fact, they found themselves in the awkward situation of players who dally too long upon the stage when the scene is concluded, and who suddenly find themselves hissed off by the spectators, who are eager for the new act with the business of which their appearance there is totally incompatible. Under these circumstances, it was evident the ministry had only one course to pursue, and that was to get through the routine business of the session as smoothly as possible, and then stand "the hazard of the die" in the general election which the accession of the king now rendered imperative. To effect this a few days were only now absolutely requisite, and these the ministers hastened to employ.

The king's accession was on the 26th of June, and on the 23d of July the king dissolved parliament in person, amidst the enthusiastic applauses of the populace, to whom the sight of the monarch going down to the House of Peers had become a rare spectacle. Whether the members of the Cabinet were at this moment fully aware of the crisis impending in France, it is impossible to say: but probably they were; and the most plausible supposition is, that, equally dreading the success or the failure of a *coup d'état* which they could not prevent, they hastened the business of parliament to a conclusion, to avoid the expression of feeling which either event was sure to produce. If this were the case, they were just in time. The king dissolved the parliament on the 23d of July, and before the week was at an end, France was again revolutionized, and the wretched remnants of the older Bourbon stock again driven from their country, in all human probability for ever.

This astounding event, although no man who was not in the secrets of the French cabinet could have foretold the exact time of its occurrence, was foreseen generally by reflecting men. It soon became evident that M. de Polignac, the favourite of the short-sighted and imbecile Charles X., was sent for from England, and made prime-minister, with some settled design of changing the position of affairs in France; and the admissions of a portion of the press here proved that there were persons in England, not altogether without influence, who were imprudent enough (to say the least of it) to abet schemes so infatuated. The news

from France, therefore, of the dissolution of the chambers; of the report of the ministry to the king on the state of the country; of the publication of the ordinances destructive of the press, of the freedom of election, and all security for personal liberty; the resistance of the people; the defection of the troops of the line and garde national; and of the successful conflict of three days at Paris, which ended in the expulson of the elder branch of the Bourbons, took no one capable of reflection by surprise. It now became clear that the *coup d'état* had been in preparation for a considerable period. It was hoped by M. de Polignac and his colleagues that the brilliant expedition to Algiers, which eventuated in the occupation (contrary to the wish of this country) of the Algerine territories and city by France, had rendered the dynasty sufficiently acceptable to the soldiery to induce them to put down their fellow-citizens by force, if they ventured to resist the royal ordinances. This hope was futile. The troops refused to resist, and, in the end, assisted the efforts of the people of Paris; and the result was the flight of the king, and the imprisonment of the ministers who had, at the expense of so much blood, assisted him to ruin himself and his family.

With whatever feelings this news was received by Mr Peel and his colleagues, their acts, at all events, were prompt and discreet. Instead of realizing the anticipations of the writer in the *Quarterly Review*, and "buckling on their armour for another quarter of a century," with the certainty of adding another

"eight hundred millions" to the debt, they at once, and without an hour of delay, recognised the French provisional government, and entered into amicable relations with its chiefs.

In truth, any other course of action would have been perilous as well as impolitic in the extreme. The news of the catastrophe at Paris was unquestionably received with satisfaction by the majority of the British public; and by the decided reformers it was hailed with undisguised delight and exultation. Public meetings were, without loss of time, convened both in the metropolis and in various of the great towns, to address and congratulate the brave people of Paris on their victory. Deputies were sent over to present these addresses at the Hôtel de Ville; and by such French vessels as happened to be lying in the British ports the tricolor-flag was again hoisted amid popular acclamation, in company with the English jack. All parties, in fact, who, from whatever motive, were inclined to sail with the reforming tide, instinctively adopted the French revolution of July 1830. They felt that it must give a fresh impulse to their cause, as strong as it was singularly well timed; and the moderation with which, on the part of the Parisians, the terrible conflict had been conducted, rendered this impulse more irresistible. The French government had put itself in the wrong. The king and his ministers, and not the people of Paris or the Chambers, were the aggressors. The revolution was, therefore, only an act of self-defence; and it was conducted certainly in that temperate manner, after the three days'

agony was past, which the sense of right and justice alone can inspire. No blood was shed vindictively. Property was everywhere respected; and the lives of the very ministers whose fanaticism had risked involving the city of Paris in blood and fire, were ultimately spared. Under the circumstances of the two countries, any attempt to revive the feelings of 1793 was clearly out of the question; the press, perceiving this, was almost unanimously in favour of the new revolution; and the existing representative system in England, whether they wished it or not, of necessity was shaken by the rebound, together with the ministry which so pertinaciously upheld it. Of this circumstance the party-writers in opposition to the ministry did not hesitate to avail themselves. They referred back to the treatise of M. Cottu (who was again in England), and insisted that the ordinance as to elections, which had now destroyed the Bourbons, was only, in fact, an attempt to imitate in France the system of nomination under the guise of representative election as it existed in England; and argued that they, who congratulated the French nation on their successful resistance to this, ought, by constitutional means, to lose no time in achieving a similar but more bloodless triumph for themselves.

These appeals were not to be parried; and of the excitement which, during the period of the general election of 1830, pervaded all Great Britain and Ireland, the opposition reaped the full benefit. Parliamentary Reform was inscribed upon the banners of every opposition candidate, of whatever grade or descrip-

tion. Even the more moderate of the adherents of the Peel and Wellington government felt themselves, at this juncture, in the popular constituencies, compelled, in some degree, to sail with the tide: and the strength of the torrent was augmented by those of their former adherents who, like the Marquis of Blandford, outraged by the concessions to the Catholics, threw themselves into the ranks of the reform party, and resolved, at all hazards and by the use of any means, to destroy a ministry whom they considered as renegades and traitors to their party and their principles, and whose parliamentary supporters they deemed unworthy of seats in a parliament which professed to be the organ of British opinion.

It must not be supposed, however, that there were not other causes at work, the tendency of which was to increase the difficulties and unpopularity of the ministry, and to influence the elections in a direction adverse to their interests. The crushing Act of 1819 had, in 1830, developed many of its consequences. In trade there was universal stagnation, declining prices, and want of confidence; but in the rural districts matters were, if possible, still worse. Owing to the deficient and imperfectly saved harvest of 1829, the prices of grain had not sunk nearly as low as they were in 1822-3, when the small notes, after being in great part withdrawn, were reprieved, or rather respited as it turned out; but the tillers of the soil were as badly off. Grain, compared with the expense of cultivating it, was still miserably low, and if the farmer got better prices somewhat than in

1822-3, he had less to sell. Under these alarming circumstances, the landlord, fearing a permanent reduction of the scale of rental, refused to assist his tenant by reduction of rent; and the farmer, pressed by his landlord, was driven to reduce to the lowest point the wages of farm-labour. This process had been slowly going on from and after the year 1826; and it now reached a point where reaction was sure to commence.* The rural labouring population, in the southern counties, being now reduced to wages really insufficient for human existence, rebelled in desperation, and these counties became filled with tumult and disorder, and, at last, with the dreadful crime of incendiarism. The county of Kent and the

* The following is the allowance, fixed by the magistrates of Dorsetshire, for the farm-labourer, in 1830,—when he could not earn so much, the residue was given from the poors-rate in that county.

When the Standard Wheaten Quartern Loaf is sold at,—	12d.	11d.	10d.	9d.	8d.	7d.
The Weekly allowance to be made up, *including earnings*,						
For a labouring Man,.....	*s.* *d.* 3 1	*s.* *d.* 2 10	*s.* *d.* 2 7	*s.* *d.* 2 4	*s.* *d.* 2 1	*s.* *d.* 1 10
For Woman, Girl, or Boy above 14,	2 4	2 2	2 0	1 10	1 8	1 6
For a Boy or Girl of 14, 13, or 12,	1 11	1 9	1 7	1 5	1 3	1 1
For ditto, 11, 10, 9,	1 7	1 6	1 4	1 3	1 2	1 0
For ditto under 9 years old, ...	1 5	1 5	1 3	1 2	1 1	1 0

It sufficiently accounts for the crime and disorganization which pervaded the rural counties of the south of England in 1830.

adjoining counties began this terrible reaction. At first the labourers contented themselves with driving beyond the confines of the county any labourers from a distance. They then attacked and drove out the hired overseers of the poor. This was followed by tumultuous assemblages, who perambulated the parishes, threatening the farmers if they did not advance their wages, and sometimes collecting contributions. To this succeeded the terrible resource of rural incendiarism, which, in the winter of 1829-30, began to be common in the more southern counties of England. Those who travelled by night saw, with horror, the horizon illuminated with many fires. England seemed to be rivalling Ireland in atrocities, insubordination, and in destitution; and men of all parties began to feel that some great change was necessary to preserve society from a state almost threatening dissolution.

To these causes of unpopularity was added another, which, in its own nature, was highly creditable to the government which it assisted to damage. This was the system of economy, commenced by the Duke of Wellington, and pursued by him with all the perseverance belonging to his stern and straightforward character. He saw, clearly and plainly, that the one thing necessary was really ease to the industrious and productive classes; and this ease he resolved they should have as far as retrenchment would afford it. Under these honest auspices, the revenue was now reduced to an amount lower than it had seen through many years before the finish of the war, and lower

than subsequent administrations, with "economy and retrenchment" for their motto, have succeeded in keeping it. But this honest course, which ought to have given, and under ordinary circumstances would have given, strength to any cabinet, helped to undermine that of the Duke of Wellington and his colleagues. Whilst the public engagements, the civil list, and the pay of the army and navy remained at almost their former nominal amount, and the value of the money in which they were paid was doubled by Act of 1819, retrenchments, here and there, in the perquisites of officials, and the superfluities of establishments, were totally insufficient to give sensible relief to those who paid the taxes, and they irritated and alarmed the classes of persons whose emoluments were thus diminished or endangered. Hence, at this critical period, many of the mercenary Swiss of the Treasury and Whitehall became chilled and disaffected towards masters who, whilst they were rigid as to the duty to be done, looked too narrowly at the amount of remuneration to be paid. Thus the mutterings of discontent pervaded all quarters; and before the general election had in a great measure foreshadowed the coming fate of the Wellington and Peel administration, men began to predict sinistrously everywhere; and an impression began to prevail that, if the Tory party were to hold their ground, they could only do so by another timely and politic concession, and by cheerfully initiating some portion of those organic reforms which they had so long, and with so much talent and determination, resisted.

CHAPTER II.

Results of the General Election—Reform generally anticipated—The new Parliament meets in November 1830—The royal Speech—Wise Conduct of Ministers as to France—Strength of the Opposition—Mr Brougham's Notice of a Motion for Reform—Earl Grey's Speech—Its powerful Effect out of Doors—The Duke of Wellington disclaims Reform—Consequent political Ferment—Mr Peel's guarded Tone—He declines to entertain the Question—Royal Visit to the City postponed by Ministers—Alarm and Irritation produced by this Event—Sir H. Parnell moves for a Committee on the Civil List—It is carried—Resignation of Ministers—Death of the first Sir Robert Peel—His Character—Character of the Wellington and Peel Administration—Earl Grey Premier—He declares for moderate Reform—Lord Radnor's Speech—Preston Election—First Reform Bill, 1st March 1831—Sir Robert Peel strongly opposes it—General Gascoygne's Motion—Ministers in a Minority—Dissolution of Parliament—Criticisms on Sir Robert Peel's Conduct.

THE general election, consequent on the succession of William IV., was completed in the autumn of 1830; and the results very closely corresponded with all that had been anticipated with regard to them. In several places, the steadiest supporters of the ministers resigned, hopeless of contesting their seats against candidates of more popular principles. In every county or borough, where the electors had any free-

dom of action, their determination to choose anti-ministerial members was shown, and with occasional success. In many instances, members who had hitherto not acted with the reformers, now proclaimed themselves converts to the general principle of some reform in the representation, and these retained their seats.

Amongst the most remarkable events of the election were the return of Mr Hume for Middlesex, and of Mr Brougham for the great and rich county of Yorkshire. This last named county, a principality in size, had been before represented by Lord Milton, eldest son of Earl Fitzwilliam, a great landed proprietor in these districts, and by Mr Marshall, a spinner of linen-yarn, of immense wealth, whose establishment was at Leeds. For this county Mr Brougham became a candidate; and his canvass resembled a triumph rather than an election process. Wherever he went he was attended by enthusiastic crowds, who hung upon his words; and who accepted his pledges "himself to bring in and carry a bill for the reform of the House of Commons," as if they were legacies of infinite value to themselves and their children's children. No man ventured to oppose him. The example of France was held up, as if it had really eventuated in a government which was showering down blessings on the people that had originated it: and the eloquent lawyer was carried through every township and parish of this great and populous district, as if he had been a lawgiver, not promising but dispensing the wonders of a golden age. On the completion of the returns, so much were the ministry found to have

lost and their opponents to have gained, that a change in the government was deemed all but certain if not quite so.*

The new parliament met for despatch of business on the 2d of November of the year 1830. The Whig opposition, now in high spirits and all zealous reformers, were evidently determined to lose no time in bringing the intentions, and with the intentions the stability also, of the ministry to the test; and, with this view, Mr Brougham immediately gave notice that he should move for leave to bring in a bill to reform the Commons House of Parliament at an early day. This notice was the first distant muttering of the storm now about to burst in a gust of popular fury upon the devoted heads of the ministers. The speech from the throne, which the new king delivered

* At the election for the close borough of Appleby, a scene was got up, calculated to exhibit the system in its most disadvantageous light. One of the members for Appleby was returned by the influence of the Lawson family; and on the day of election the following strange interlude was enacted between the agent of the patron and the worthy mayor of the borough. When the time arrived for proposing the second member, the following pithy dialogue took place. THE MAYOR. Is any gentleman prepared to propose a second candidate? THE AGENT, certainly not to *propose!*—Mr Mayor, *I nominate and appoint Lucius Concannon, Esquire, to be a member for this borough.* THE MAYOR, Pray, sir, allow me to ask *who* is, and *where* is, Lucius Concannon, Esquire? THE AGENT, Mr Mayor, I neither know nor care! and, if I don't, why the d——l should you?

This scene, got up for the occasion, produced no inconsiderable impression on the public mind. Lord Camelford could only have gone a step further, when he threatened to return his black servant in livery!

in person, excited in itself little debate or attention. Its only remarkable feature was the absence of even the slightest or most remote allusion to the topic which was now agitating the entire kingdom, that of a Parliamentary Reform. As usual, Mr O'Connell was attacked, though without being named; and the attempts to create an agitation for the repeal of the Union were alluded to in bitter terms. On the subject of the momentous change in France the language of the speech was very significant in its brevity. It merely and dryly stated that the elder branch of the Bourbons "had ceased to reign" (a phrase, by the way, of Napoleon), and that his Majesty had deemed it wise as well as prudent to cultivate amicable relations with the illustrious person who was now "King of the French." On the state of Belgium, where revolt against the Dutch king, or rather the Dutch debt, was triumphant, the speech dwelt with some uneasiness. It concluded by calling upon the House to vote a fresh civil list to commence the new reign.

In the House of Peers, the same decisive course was taken, and with even less loss of time than was witnessed in the Commons. As soon as the address in answer to the royal speech was moved and seconded, Earl Grey, who now felt himself beyond a doubt virtually prime minister, rose, resolved to lose no time in putting his adversaries in a false position. Alluding to the fears excited by the revolution in France, and still more by the Belgic revolt, which threatened serious involvements, the noble earl went on to say: "I do not look for defence in augmented establish-

ments, to an increased army or navy; on the contrary, I am convinced that such precautions would bring upon us the very danger which we sought by their adoption to avert. Were we to arm, as the noble lord has intimated we ought to do, and, as he says, all Europe is doing, if we were to adopt such a policy, I am sure that one little month would not pass away without our being involved in a war with France. 'But,' says the noble Lord, 'you see the hurricane approaching. The storm is gathering in the horizon—What is there to be done? Why, put your house in order, secure your roofs, bar your windows, make fast your doors, and the storm may drive over you without injury.' I admit it. But, my Lords, *how* is this to be effected? Is it by the mode proposed by the noble lord? No, no; it must be done by securing the affections of the people, by removing grievances, by affording redress; in short—I shall venture to pronounce the word—it must be done by REFORM."

Lord Grey then proceeded to guard himself against being supposed to countenance those extreme measures of representative reformation advocated by the section styled "radical reformers," and he trode over this delicate ground thus:—

"I have already told your Lordships that I have been a reformer all my life. In my younger days, with all the warmth —perhaps I may say rashness, of youth—I pressed the matter of reform further than I may now be disposed to do. But at the same time, I must say, that I have never urged the question of reform on the principle of abstract right, which it is so

much the fashion to put forward, nor with a view to universal suffrage, which, in my opinion, would not improve the condition of the representation of the country to such an extent as I think it may be improved.

"We have been told by some advocates of reform of the right possessed by every man who pays taxes to vote for representatives; and we have even been told of the right of every man arrived at full age to exercise such privilege. For my own part, I deny the existence of such a right. In my opinion, the right of the people is to have a good government—to have one calculated to secure their happiness, their liberties, and their privileges; and if it be found that this security is not compatible with a universal suffrage, then I say that the limitation, and not the extension, of this right of suffrage, is the true right of the people.

"In answer to what noble lords have said on the necessity of guarding against the storm with which we are threatened, I must declare my opinion, that the true preparations and true defences consist in fortifying the weak parts of our constitution, in extending its blessings, and in thus reviving the weakened affections of the people by teaching them to love institutions which really secure their liberties, and to repose confidence in a king who lives and reigns for the good of his subjects. With respect to what has passed in France, I certainly approve, entirely and cordially, of all that has been done by the French people. Do not think, however, my lords, that, in saying this, I wish to afford countenance to revolutions in the abstract: do not think that. All revolutions, even when necessary, as in the instance now alluded to, are in themselves evils. If I were called upon to pronounce an opinion upon this French revolution, I should say that I regret exceedingly its necessity, which, however, is undoubted. I should say that I wish, for the sake of France and of Europe, and of the very family now expelled, that Charles X. and his ministers could have seen the wisdom of complying with the new order of things, and had felt it their

duty to support instead of attacking a charter which they had sworn to defend. I should say, I wish they had extended to the people of France the benefits of that good and free government which is their right, and without which it was impossible there that public security could exist. This, my lords, is the course I could have wished that the ex-king and his political advisers had adopted, since they would thus, I believe, have escaped the fate which has befallen that royal but unfortunate family, and have averted dangers to which no man, my lords, can shut his eyes. But, my lords, the revolution in France has been rendered necessary by the unjustifiable—I say that because I am unwilling now to use harsher terms—I say, by the unjustifiable attack by the ex-king upon the liberties of his people. I rejoice, as an Englishman who is deriving the benefits of a free constitution from the consequences of a similar measure,—I rejoice, I say, in the success which has attended the popular party in the struggle. In such a case, resistance was necessary, was noble. . . .; nor can I, my lords, conceive a more heart-stirring scene than that of a brave people rushing into a conflict so holy with a courage worthy of their task, and using their victory, when won, with such moderation."

This address was well calculated to bring about the result desired by the noble earl who spoke; and, as a matter of course, it called up the Duke of Wellington, and elicited from him that which satisfied the whole country as to his wishes and his intentions with regard to the great question then agitating the national mind.

After various observations as to the difficulties arising out of the Belgian revolt against the sordid yoke of the Dutch, as well as upon the state of Portugal, and the relations of the new French government

with this country, the duke thus proceeded on the reform question:—

"This brings me to the recommendation which the noble earl has made, not only to put down these disturbances, but to put this country into a state to meet and overcome the dangers which are likely to result from the late transactions in France; namely, the adoption of something in the nature of a parliamentary reform. The noble earl has stated that he is not himself prepared to come forward with any measure of the kind, and I will tell him that neither is the government. Nay, I will go further, and say, that I have not heard of any measure up to this moment which could in any degree satisfy my mind, or by which the state of the representation could be improved, or placed on a footing more satisfactory to the people of this country than it now is.

"I will not now enter upon the discussion of this subject, as, I dare say, we shall have plenty of opportunities for doing so; but I will say, that I am thoroughly convinced that England possesses at this moment a legislature which answers all the good purposes of a legislature in a higher degree than any scheme of government has been found to answer in any country in the world; that it possesses the confidence of the country; that it deservedly possesses that confidence; and that its decisions have justly the greatest weight and influence with the people. Nay, my lords, I will go further yet, and say that, if at this moment I had to form a legislature for any country, particularly for one like this, in the possession of great property of various descriptions—although, perhaps, I should not form one precisely such as we have—I would endeavour to produce something which should give the same results; namely, a representation of the people containing a large body of the property of the country, and in which the great landed proprietors should have the preponderating influence."—*Mirror of Parliament*, 1830, p. 18.

If, as is by far the most probable supposition, this

singularly candid exposition of the feelings of the Wellington government as to a reform of the House of Commons was spoken under an impression that a reforming ministry was about to supplant them, no one can blame its candour. It was only saying, in other words, that all such schemes would be opposed to the uttermost by the duke and by Mr Peel and their supporters. If, on the contrary, they expected to find a majority of the new parliament still favourable to them, nothing could be more injudicious. The bitter feelings induced in the breast of millions by this speech, were incalculable in extent; and from this moment, even on the part of the populace, an active warfare was commenced against all persons supposed to be favourable to the longer continuance of the administration. Even the great military renown of the premier, and the hold which his exploits had taken upon the public mind, ever favourable to lucky and successful generalship, was now of no avail to protect him from insult and even personal risk. The very candour and unflinching plainness of the explanation were construed into insult and irony by the reformers; and the duke and his party were set down as the avowed friends of an arbitrary oligarchical rule, under the veil of a representation too flimsy to deceive anybody not an idiot.

In the House of Commons, the language of the right honourable Secretary for the Home Department was much more guarded. During the debate which followed the speech from the throne, he had as carefully as in the composition of the speech itself avoided

all allusion to the question of parliamentary reform; but in the debate which occurred when the report on the address was brought up, he was not allowed thus to evade this vital point. Such was the irritation and impatience which the determined declaration of the Duke of Wellington had excited, that the question could not now be ignored even for twenty-four hours; and under this impression the right honourable Secretary thus addressed himself to the task :—

" The discussion which had just taken place imposed on him (he said) the duty of making one or two observations on the subject of parliamentary reform, respecting which the honourable and learned member for York had so recently given notice of a motion. This task he would rather, on the present occasion, have avoided, as he was unwilling to express an opinion on such a question until it should have been legitimately brought under the consideration of the House. I should then have been prepared (continued the right honourable Secretary) to give my opinion according to the best of my judgment, upon any proposition which the honourable and learned gentleman might submit. But, sir, the construction that has been put upon the declaration of a right honourable friend and colleague leaves me no means to avoid discussing it now. I have never taken a very decided part upon the subject of reform (hear, hear), although I may have given my opposition to different proposals upon that subject which have been brought forward during my parliamentary career. But on these occasions, with very few exceptions, I have contented myself with a silent vote. I repeat that I could wish to avoid any declaration now; but in order to prevent misconception as to the opinion of my right honourable friend delivered this night, and which has been construed as marking the opinion of government generally, I feel myself bound to declare that I

see difficulties in the question which I, for one, am not prepared to surmount. I wish to say nothing now, however, which may prejudice future discussion; at the same time, to prevent misconception, I do say that I see the greatest difficulties in an agitation of the question. I do not conceal from the House that the "moderate reform" to which the honourable gentleman has alluded, might, under certain circumstances, be introduced with advantage; but then, at present, I do not see the bounds to which the limitation is to be fixed. The honourable and learned member for Nottingham indeed gives me very little reason to hope that any moderate reform to which I could assent would be at all satisfactory to him, or would assure him that the House of Commons properly represented the people of England; because, if I understand the honourable and learned gentleman, no reform could satisfy him which did not totally exclude the interference of peers in elections. If indeed there was anything of value in the argument of the learned gentleman, it was of value against the influence of aristocratical property at elections. In fine, the different sentiments expressed upon this subject—the different principles on which it is proposed—the little prospect I see of the adoption of any system of reform that I could consider safe—present to my mind difficulties which I must at once confess I am by no means prepared to meet."—*Mirror of Parliament*, 1830, p. 73.

This declaration, in the then excited state of the public mind, was by no means calculated to allay the anger created by the unceremonious repudiation of all reforming schemes on the part of the Duke of Wellington. It only passed for *a denial à la Peel;* as the other unquestionably was a denial quite characteristic of the extraordinary personage who uttered it. The depth and violence of the agitation produced by the crisis at which affairs had now manifestly arrived,

were not long in discovering themselves. Whether differences of opinion had or had not prevailed in the cabinet, as to this now vital matter, it is impossible to say; but certain it is that, after the declarations of the Premier and the Secretary, it seemed to be a settled point with the mass of the people to regard the ministers as servants at variance with their master, and as enemies of the nation whom they were bound to benefit and protect. A few days sufficed to make this feeling very apparent.

The King, whose policy as well as inclinations led him to mix with his subjects on all proper occasions, had intimated that it was his pleasure to dine with his good citizens of London during the month of November, when the Lord Major is elected, and the corporate year commences. On this day—the 9th November—the Lord Mayor entertains all the great officers of state, ministers, judges, generals, ambassadors, and distinguished strangers of all descriptions; and as the King was, on this occasion, to be the Lord Mayor's guest, every civic preparation possible that could celebrate his Majesty's entry into the city, and grace him when there, was made. Amidst all these festal proceedings, however, there arose an under-current of uneasiness and misgiving. It was secretly whispered about the city that, as the King's progress to the Guildhall would be in the evening, several desperate and vindictive characters amongst the London populace had determined to wreak their resentment on the Duke of Wellington during his passage through the streets; as to the Duke's rooted hatred of popular government was

attributed the stand against reform made by the Cabinet. Of these alarming but whispered reports the public, in London as well as over the rest of the kingdom, were kept, of course, in entire ignorance; and this being the case, it is easy to conceive the degree of astonishment and even consternation with which the tidings were everywhere received that the ministers had prevailed upon his Majesty to forego the Guildhall festal ceremonies and banquet, and that the cause of this was the necessity of the absence of the prime minister, whose life, if he went with the king, was believed to be seriously imperilled.

To what extent the information really in possession of the city authorities went, it is impossible to say. It is quite clear that barely enough was divulged to excuse the step taken by the ministers. All that is known is, that a letter was written to the Duke of Wellington by Mr Alderman Key, the Lord Mayor elect, a few days prior to the city festivity, acquainting his Grace that information of too grave a nature to be disbelieved had been received by him and others of an intended attack upon the Duke, and advising him to have recourse to a military guard whilst he passed to the Guildhall. Information of the same description seems also to have reached the Secretary of State's office; and the result was that, after an interview between the city authorities and the Home Secretary at the Secretary of State's office, it was deemed, on the whole, advisable not to run any risk of insubordination in his Majesty's presence, and the determination was come to that the King should be

asked to forego the intended visit, which the good-natured monarch readily did. This untoward event —for such it certainly was—crowned the climax of prejudice which was now surging on all sides round the devoted administration. All who were opposed to them, for whatever reason, joined in the outcry now raised all round the kingdom, that his Majesty was to be kept a prisoner in his own palace because his late brother's ministers were too hateful to the people to venture into the streets, even with their King as a safeguard; and the House of Commons was deluged with petitions for reform, and for the dismissal of the King's unworthy servants. Such conversations as took place in the two Houses of Parliament on the subject threw no further light upon it. The right honourable Secretary merely stated that his communications with the Lord Mayor elect and other city authorities, were such as to convince him that the course taken was the proper course.

The Houses deplored the spirit of hatred to the Duke of Wellington that was now too manifest in many quarters, and Mr Alderman Waithman indignantly scouted the idea that the city police could not have preserved "perfect order;" but the exact nature of the information on which government acted remained undivulged, and the public commented on this strange event with all that variety of opinion which must ever occur when those who criticise are entirely ignorant on the subject of their animadversions. One point was now certainly clear, both to the majority of the House of Commons and to the

majority of the nation, and that was, that, amidst such a universal want of confidence and goodwill, no administration either could or ought to stand; and the Commons took the first opportunity to make manifest that this had become their opinion.

On the 15th November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer having moved that the House go into a committee of the whole House, in order to go through the items of the civil list, Sir Henry Parnell, one of the Economists of the Whig party, moved as an amendment that "a select committee be appointed to examine the accounts presented to the House by order of his Majesty connected with the civil list, and to report thereupon." This amendment was cunningly worded for the occasion. It did not, if carried, commit the Whig party to anything. It went merely to inquire; and an inquiry *might* end in a discovery that the civil list, as proposed by the Tories, was not, in its principal provisions, liberal enough! In point of fact it, in words, left the party who proposed it unfettered; whilst with respect to ministers it implied, if it succeeded, a lack of confidence, and almost amounted to a formal vote of "want of confidence," though the want was inferred and not expressed. The amendment was feebly opposed by the government (who knew their hour was come), on the ground that there was no precedent for a committee of inquiry of any kind on any former occasion. After a short debate, the issue of which was foreseen from the first, the House divided upon the original motion, when there appeared against it 204, and in favour of

it 233,—making a majority against the ministers of 29,—a decision which was received with loud and tumultuous cheering on the part of the now triumphant opposition, and by the majority of the country with exultation—so great and so extraordinary had been the change in opinions and feelings within a few years.

Thus, after a brief and uncertain tenure of power for not more than two years, was destroyed, by a remarkable union of adverse causes, an administration which by most of its supporters was fondly esteemed to be one of the strongest which Great Britain had seen since the era of the almost omnipotent William Pitt. A few weeks before his final loss of power, Mr Peel had, by the death of his father, succeeded to the baronetcy and a large share of the princely fortune of the first Sir Robert Peel.* Nor

* The late Dr William Cooke Taylor, in his "Life and Times of Sir Robert Peel" (p. 35), gives the following abstract of the will of the first baronet:—"After entailing Drayton Park (and manor), and the other large estates in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, it proceeds to recite sums, to the amount of nearly a quarter of a million, previously advanced to or settled upon his several children (not including £9000 per annum settled on his eldest son), and then bequeaths about £600,000 more,—making the portions of his five younger sons £106,000 each, and those of his daughters £53,000 each. He leaves to a chapel erected by him at Fazeley, in Staffordshire, £1000 (afterwards revoked, because he had endowed it with lands), and £6000 to a school established by him in the same village. To the infirmary and lunatic hospital of Manchester he bequeaths £100 each. The will is dated July 27th, 1820. By a codicil, dated February 11th, 1825, the portions of his younger sons

was the founder of the family of Peel much less extraordinary as a man than was his celebrated son. He lived to see fulfilled all that a strong imagination, combined with talent and great self-reliance, had foreseen in the dim vista of the future. By enterprise and steadiness, and a remarkable power of management, he realized a fortune which, in its magnitude, reminds the reader of that of the Fuggers of Antwerp, or the merchant-princes of Venice and of Florence some centuries back. He, from the first, destined his eldest son for public life, and by an education in which nothing was spared, he endowed him with those accomplishments which, superadded to great and peculiar natural powers, raised him at length to the highest offices of the state. This amazing success was not, however, without some alloy. The strong and practical mind of the first Sir Robert Peel, rich in experience and sagacious in its application, led him to detect the monstrous errors of the Economist committees of 1810 and 1819, and to lament the association of his accomplished son's name with the rash and suicidal act which was completed in the course of that last ill-starred year. He did not live to witness the

are increased to £135,000 each; and of the residue, which is said to have exceeded half-a-million, four-ninths are bequeathed to his eldest son, Robert, and one-ninth to each of his younger sons. The personal property was sworn at what is technically called "upper value," which means that it exceeded £900,000; and it was the first instance of the scale of duties extending to such a sum. The probate stamp was £15,000, and the legacy duties were about £10,000 more.

catastrophe of his party in 1830, but that he traced the decline of their once enormous influence to that rash measure cannot be doubted, any more than that he foresaw its corroding consequences through the series of years that have followed and are yet to follow, until time and bitter experience shall have taught the nation the hidden causes of the too palpable effects which it deprecates.

Some superficial observers have attributed the fall of the Peel and Wellington ministry to the distractions engendered by the emancipation measure of 1829; and others to the excitement caused by the successful (as far as the expatriation of the elder Bourbons are concerned) revolt at Paris in July 1830. That they *were* causes cannot be denied, but they were altogether minor causes. The fact is, the commencement of the decline of the high Tory party may be traced as far back as 1809, when the Economists began a line of speculation which eventually led those who indulged in it into other divergences of conduct fatal to the cohesion of a jealous and successful party. Such minor disruptions are, by thoughtless persons, held cheaply and as of small account. But this is a fatal mistake in politics. They resemble in their action those first small breaches in a building which let the gale in under the roof, which is at last lifted off in the long-run as a consequence. The collapse which succeeded the first diminution of the paper-money, upon which Pitt's power had really rested, aggravated the evil influences of those early differences; and the act for cash-payments, in 1819, decided the conduct

of thousands of waverers who will support a progressive but who draw off from a declining side. The consequences of the act were evaded for some years; but, in the mean time, the periodical press, which had gained strength from the rise of Bonaparte to power, became totally free from and after the trial of the persecuted Queen Caroline. To the difficulties thus caused, the "ill-weaved ambition" of Canning and his short lease of an unstable power greatly added. The final extinction of the small paper in 1829, the consequent growing distress; the debility of government which followed; the triumph of the Catholic Association, and the wretched *coup d'état* and failure of De Polignac completed the work, and sealed the unpopularity and miserable divisions of one of the greatest and most powerful parties that ever clutched in its hands the destinies of a country.

In the demolition of the Peel and Wellington administration we have only another proof how capricious the fates of public men often are. Few ministries have expired under a heavier storm of unpopularity; yet he who judges of them by their acts, as compared with those of other administrations, will admit them to be one of the best that this country had for some time seen. That the wish of the Duke of Wellington was, as prime-minister, really to benefit his country, seems undeniable. It is well known that he cooled the ardour of his more mercenary supporters by the various reductions in the salaries and perquisites of officials, which he effected or intended to effect; and it is now believed by some that he contemplated the

substitution of some taxes for other existing taxes on the necessaries of life, which would have been anything but acceptable to that powerful class, the dealers in money. The Duke of Wellington, in fact, did not conceal his honest belief that if the country was to be relieved, it could only be so by lessening its burdens, a measure to the carrying out of which it is surmised that he held the necessity of all interests, without exception, being called upon to sacrifice something. The tax upon "transfers of stock," which Lord Althorp attempted in vain to carry, was believed to have been one of the measures contemplated by the preceding cabinet; and had the duke's other acts been such as to prolong the existence of his administration, there seems little doubt that this, and other measures of similar tendency, would have been carried.* As it

* The following return, which was obtained during the Wellington administration, probably had some reference to these rumoured schemes; to which Lord Farnham seems to have alluded, in the course of the debate on the address, at the opening of the new parliament in November 1830.

Extracted from the Bank Return of 1829.

Receivers of half-yearly dividends, not exceeding £5, are in number	85,154
Above £5 and under £10	42,167
Above £10 and under £50	97,673
Above £50 and under £100	25,822
Above £100 and under £200	15,046
Above £200 and under £300	4,812
Above £300 and under £500	3,076
Above £500 and under £1000	1,501
Above £1000 and under £2000	436
All upwards	152

was, the expenditure was reduced by his administration nearly as low as £47,000,000 annually, in round numbers. The surplus revenue which appeared upon the face of the accounts at the conclusion of the duke's holding office was, in fact, apparent only, and arose out of the transactions with the bank, which made a portion of the abortive dead weight scheme. Leaving the question untouched, however, as to how far any economy can be of appreciable use, whilst the giant confiscations of the act of 1819 are suffered to go on from year to year, candour must own that the

These returns, as given, are delusive, and do not afford *data* for any correct conclusions of any value. The following estimate was made by a member of the Stock Exchange, who had access to the books, and may be depended upon:—

The whole number of fund-holders in 1829	275,839
Of these, those who receive interest under £200 a-year are	250,816
Those who receive interest under £1000 a-year ...	22,934
Those who receive interest under £4000 a-year ...	1,937
The rest	152
	275,839

I estimate that on the average the 250,816 persons receive above	£9,000,000
The 22,934 receive	8,500,000
The 1,937 receive	3,500,000
The 152 receive all the rest	9,000,000
	£30,000,000

Extracted from *Cobbett's Register* of the 14th February 1835.

Wellington and Peel administration was the most economical one that, for a long period, the nation had seen; and when we reflect upon the perilous struggle then about to commence, and compare the financial and social state of the nation since, with its financial social position just prior to that commencement, it is difficult to deny that the awkward question of "*cui bono*" has become a very embarrassing one.

The success of Sir Henry Parnell's amendment was of course immediately decisive of the fate of the ministry. The members of the Wellington cabinet lost no time in tendering their resignations to the king, who, as a matter of necessity, at once accepted them, and proceeded to charge Earl Grey with the duty of forming an administration, which the venerable nobleman immediately undertook, and after a few days' negotiation fulfilled.* The leading prin-

* The government of Earl Grey was constructed as follows:—First Lord of the Treasury, Earl Grey; Lord Chancellor, Lord Brougham and Vaux; President of the Privy Council, Marquis of Lansdowne; Privy Seal, Lord Durham; Home Secretary, Viscount Melbourne; Under Home Secretary, Hon. George Lamb; Colonial Secretary, Viscount Goderich; Under Colonial Secretary, Lord Howick; Foreign Secretary, Viscount Palmerston; Chancellor of the Exchequer, Viscount Althorp; First Lord of Admiralty, Sir James Graham; President of the Board of Control, Right Hon. Charles Grant; President of the Board of Trade and Master of the Mint, Lord Auckland; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Holland; Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Marquis of Anglesea; Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire; Postmaster-General, the Duke of Richmond; Master of the Horse, Earl of Albermarle; Lord Steward, the Marquis Wellesley; Judge-Advocate, Mr R. Grant;

ciples of the new administration were or were said to be retrenchment of expenditure, peace, and non-intervention in the affairs of foreign nations, and an efficient parliamentary reform. Whatever may have been the secret wishes or the secret fears of many of the party, now called under these trying circumstances to power, to these principles they were now fixed; for in the then state of the public mind, the slightest appearance of hesitation, or manifestation of shrinking or faltering, would have been destruction. In all material and essential means of strength they were still the weaker party; and against any reconstruction of their Tory opponents, in a united phalanx, they could only be supported by the active aid of a vast majority of the people.

Sir Robert Peel was now, for the first time, in active opposition to the existing government, of whose designs he unquestionably entertained a sincere and perhaps exaggerated dread. He had indeed, with small show of probability, been accused of being the secret and virulent opponent of Mr Canning, though

Woods and Forests, A. Ellis; Paymaster-General, Lord John Russell; Vice-President of the Board of Trade, &c., Mr Charles P. Thomson; Secretary for Ireland, E. G. S. Stanley; Master of the Ordnance, Sir W. Gordon; Surveyor-General of ditto, Sir R. Spencer; Secretaries of the Treasury, Messrs. Edward Ellice and Spring Rice; Master of the King's Buckhounds, Viscount Anson; Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Denman; Solicitor-General, Sir W. Horne; Lord Chancellor for Ireland, Lord Plunkett; Attorney-General for Ireland, Mr Pennefather; Solicitor-General for ditto, Mr Doherty; Lord-Advocate for Scotland, Lord Jeffrey; Solicitor-General for ditto, Mr Cockburn.

outwardly disclaiming opposition; and the death of that ambitious and specious person had beeen attempted to be laid at his door; as if the very view of the difficulties that thronged around the house-of-cards-administration which he had built, was not sufficient to shorten the life of an irritable and exhausted valetudinarian like Mr Canning. These difficulties were well known to Sir Robert Peel; and knowing, as he must have done, that the administration of 1828 resembled a feverish dream rather than a government, it is unlikely he should have compromised himself by intriguing against a power that he must have foreseen a short time would inevitably, and without his help, bring to the ground. The crisis of 1830 was, however, a very different affair; and that the risks it involved were coolly weighed by the well-poised mind of Sir Robert Peel is now no matter for doubt. That he viewed with the alarm too common to his party the extravagant hopes and anticipations now indulged in by the mass of the people, is sufficiently certain. At an ordinary time he might have speculated upon the disappointment which was sure to ensue as a precursor of his own return to power; but in 1830 this was a perilous adventure. Without in the least attributing to the now triumphant Whig party any design really to sweep away the system under which the country had been so long ruled, it was yet not easy to foresee how far men even with the best intentions might be hurried by the growing torrent of democratic aspirations, or to what desperate recourses men about to be dispossessed of power might not in the end be tempted.

Hence, during the struggle which ensued, moderate men on either side looked to Sir Robert Peel as a possible mediator between two parties whose excited passions might render both, for the moment, equally dangerous as far as the institutions of the country were concerned. How far these anticipations were fulfilled will be seen hereafter.

The feverous state of agitation, into which the people were now plunged on the momentous question of Parliamentary Reform, soon made itself manifest. The alarming state of insubordination in the agricultural counties, resulting in the struggle to reduce wages to the starvation-point in order to enable rents to be kept at the existing level, and respecting which opinions and notions the most absurd were prevalent in the highest quarters, became, except by those immediately concerned, comparatively unheeded. Scattered notices of the terrible spread of incendiary rural fires appeared, indeed, in the columns of the public journals; but the attention they excited was secondary only. Reform was the one idea that now pervaded the nation; it was the popular panacea for all political evils; and hardly were the new ministers installed in their places before distrust of their intentions began to be shown.

On the 22d November, the Marquis of Lansdowne on presenting, for the first time from the ministerial side of the House, some petitions for Parliamentary Reform, took occasion to express himself as follows :—

"I cannot but agree with the petitioners in believing that

some amendment of the present system of representation is necessary; still more when I find one considerable and highly civilized portion of the empire without more than the shadow of a virtual representation, I think, with the petitioners, that the consideration of this question with a view to its settlement is necessary. I am a friend to amendment in the representative system;—but, with all my feelings in its favour, I am prepared, for one, to say that to no proposition for a reform in parliament which does not leave the property and knowledge of the country—those two chief elements of civilized society—a share, and I will even say a preponderating share, in the representation—to no reform which does not do this—as an honest man looking to the permanent welfare of both the people and the monarchy, can I give my consent."

This declaration in favour of moderation in the work of reforming called up Earl Grey, whose sentiments on this vital subject were now watched with an incessant anxiety. The Earl wisely confined himself to generalities; and delivered himself with a studied caution, for which he certainly ought not to have been blamed when his position was considered.

"My Lords (said the noble Premier), on the most important subject to which these petitions refer, it cannot, I think, be necessary that I should say much. My opinions as to a parliamentary reform have long been known to you. I have had reason to express them on more than one occasion; and it is not long since I felt myself called upon to address your Lordships on this very subject. It was in the debate, on the first day of this session. I then, my Lords, stated out of office, what I now repeat—being in office,—that is to say, my sincere conviction of the necessity that government (by whom alone the question can be satisfactorily introduced and settled) should take into their immediate consideration the state of the representation

of the people in the Commons House of Parliament, with a view to the correction of those defects which have been occasioned in it by the operation of time, and to the re-establishment of that confidence on the part of the people which I am afraid parliament does not enjoy at present to the full extent necessary for the welfare and even the safety of the country. I said, at the same time, that I was not one of those who felt inclined to support any of the fanciful and extreme plans of reform which have been promulgated by persons out of doors, and which if adopted would end, not in reform, but in anarchy and confusion. I never have supported, and I do not now intend to support, the principles of universal suffrage, nor of any of those wide and extensive changes which have been propounded in some quarters from which better things might have been expected. I wish to stand as much as I can upon the fixed and settled institutions of the country: and feeling that some reform is necessary, the principle on which I wish to regulate it would be that of doing as much as is necessary to secure to the people a due influence in that great council in which they are more peculiarly interested, and securing, by that means, and restoring a satisfaction and a confidence in the determinations of parliament."

The effect of this cautiously worded address was to call up Lord Radnor, a peer who, when in the House of Commons as Lord Folkstone, was remarkable for his adhesion to extreme principles of reform, as propounded by Sir Francis Burdett and others. Being himself patron of a decayed borough, Folkstone, his own sincerity could not be questioned; and it was very manifest that he most vehemently distrusted the intentions of the newly installed ministers and their immediate adherents. Lord Radnor spoke to the following effect:—

"I did not intend to have addressed your Lordships on this occasion, but I consider some of the expressions which have fallen from the noble earl, as well as from the noble marquis who preceded him, to have been of such a tendency as will call forth an expression of disappointment from all who are friendly to reform. It is my firm conviction that Parliamentary Reform is not only expedient, but that it is the only measure which can ensure the peace and salvation of the country. If the noble earl thinks that he can satisfy the expectation of the people by any measure like that which he has suggested, he will, I believe, find himself very much mistaken. If the government are not prepared to come forward with some proposition which will give the people an extensive share in the election of members of the other House, I can assure him that he will find the task he has now undertaken much more difficult than he perhaps expects it to be. Something must be done which will lead the people to place confidence in the parliament and the government; and unless this be effected, all the plans of ministers will be useless. The hopes of the nation have, within a very few days, been raised to a high point, as the people flattered themselves that, at last, an administration had been framed favourably disposed to a real reform. I, on this account particularly regret the language which has been used in the course of this night. I indeed feel certain that when the speech of the noble marquis on this subject, accompanied by the commentary of the noble earl, goes before the country, it will create in every quarter great consternation and dismay. * * * * *

If I understood the noble marquis correctly—I am not sure that I did—the noble marquis's plan of reform is to grant the elective franchise to some large towns, but also to preserve the least defensible portion of the system—the small and decayed boroughs. If the noble earl meant, in speaking of his intention to adopt no system of reform which should affect the settled institutions of the realm, meant none which did not pre-

serve these boroughs, then I tell the noble earl that these declarations from two ministers will spread dismay and consternation over all the country. I am convinced, my Lords, as strongly as I can be of any thing, that such a reform will be rejected by the country.

"I hope I have mistaken the meaning of the noble earl—and I trust, if so, that he will set me right, and not let any mistaken impression, such as that I allude to, go forth to the country. For I must repeat that if the noble earl were to suffer an opinion to pass that he was not firm in the cause of real reform, a feeling of dismay will be felt from one end to the other of the country."

Earl Grey having explained that he meant no such limitation as that supposed by Lord Radnor; and Lord Carnarvon having warned the House that a mere Reform Act, if not followed by measures for giving ease to the people, would be of no avail to still agitation and discontent, the debate dropped. It sufficiently proved, however, the great jealousy which now prevailed, and which was equally manifest in the lower House, where Sir Robert was accused of "justifying" the ordinances which led to the French Revolution of July 1830, because he pointed out the unhappy effect upon the commercial prosperity of France caused even by revolution justifiable in itself, and warned the House against entertaining any projects of reform that might tend to national disturbance—a sentiment which, whatever might be the motive for uttering it, was certainly, in itself, sufficiently unobjectionable.

As the ordinary business of the session went on, in the midst of these suspicions and misgivings on the

part of those who were bent upon some kind of extensive change, the determination of the people at large to have some greater weight in the legislature, aided by the efforts of the liberal press, visibly grew and increased from day to day. One of the most extraordinary symptoms of the power of the feeling now abroad was the result of the election for the manufacturing town of Preston, in Lancashire.

Preston originally was one of those small, ancient, rural boroughs which returned members to parliament by a burgage or household suffrage; but by the growth in the county of Lancashire of the cotton-spinning trade, it was gradually invested with more importance, and became the site of a numerous manufacturing population who, as pot-wallopers or small householders, were electors of the borough. Preston, in its rural state, had become, like most of the other small rural boroughs, a property of the aristocracy, and was a parliamentary appendage of the rich and powerful family of the Stanleys, of whom the Earl of Derby was the head. Since the extension of its population, however, and the introduction into it of manufactures on a large scale, it had gradually become refractory under the nomination system, and had already made more than one attempt to destroy the influence of the Stanleys over its elections, but without success. Under the impulse now given to the enthusiasm and ambition of the people, this spirit at length became ungovernable, and popularly successful as a result, in spite of every effort of the wealthy house who were patrons of the borough in

former time. On the accession of the Whigs to political power, the grandson of the Earl of Derby, a young man of talent, the Hon. E. G. Stanley, had been appointed to fill the arduous post of Secretary for Ireland, formerly held by Sir Robert Peel, when of about the same age. In this case Mr Stanley had the *prestige* of "reform" partly in his favour; and this, joined to the vast influence of his family, was believed to be sufficient to secure his election. All however failed. Mr Stanley, though ready to support the cabinet in such a plan of reform as he believed them willing to propose, was bitterly opposed to the system of voting by secret ballot, and to some of the other more obnoxious demands of the section now known as Radical Reformers. An opposition on the part of the lower classes was accordingly resolved; and Mr Henry Hunt, who had for many years been conspicuous as an unflinching advocate of a radical reform, having been accordingly proposed, was, after a contest of some days, returned by a majority of 338 votes, Mr Stanley having exhausted the whole of his voters, to the amount of 3392.

That this painful lesson in December 1830 influenced somewhat the nature of the bill for reform proposed in the March ensuing, can hardly be doubted. It proved to the party in power that the mass of the people were now determined, as far as in them lay, to promote and secure some change that should give them more or less of direct influence with the governing powers; and the Whigs were aware that, if they totally disappointed the nation and were deserted by it at this

crisis, their destruction would be speedy, so superior were the great Tory party in wealth and family influence. Indeed experience has since demonstrated that, in spite of the reform-bill, this superiority yet exists; the Whig party, whenever deserted by public opinion, having sunk before the power of their opponents. A reform-bill, with some reality of change embodied, had therefore become a party as well as a state necessity; and that this truth was felt and admitted by the cabinet was amply proved in the event.

On the memorable 1st of March 1831, the first bill for the reform of the representation was introduced into the House of Commons by the Paymaster of the Forces, Lord John Russell, a younger son of the Duke of Bedford, to whom this certainly trying task was confided by the administration. It is not using terms too strong to say that this bill electrified the country.* It did so because it surprised both the friends and

* The provisions of this bill were principally as follows:—In the counties, besides the freehold franchise, it gave votes to owners of copyhold property of £10 per annum and upwards, and to holders of leases of £50 per annum and upwards if for twenty-one years. In towns and cities, it continued the franchises of existing freemen or burgage-holders for their lives, but extended the right of voting to all resident householders paying £10 per annum of rent or upwards. It limited the days of polling in counties to eight—in towns to three days. It then proceeded to deal with the close boroughs, which it did by the total disfranchisement of sixty, of which the population was under two thousand. From forty-seven others it took away one member. In Scotland and Wales, small boroughs were joined to enable them to send a member. In Ireland, where the representation had been remodelled by the act of Union, little alteration was proposed. The bill then went on to enact additional or new members

enemies of the ministry, of whom neither had given the Whig party credit for any desire to carry a measure so comprehensive and decided in principle.

to be sent from certain large towns and counties; the total result being this:—

Total number of members in March 1831	658
Total number proposed to be disfranchised	168
Leaving	490
Additional members for Scotland	5
Ditto ditto Ireland	3
Ditto ditto Wales	1
Ditto ditto Metropolis	8
New members for large towns in England	34
Additional members for divided counties	55
	106
Members not disfranchised	490
Making the total House of Commons, being a diminution of sixty-two members	596

Some doubts have been thrown upon the real origin of this bill; but the truth is believed to be, that much of it was taken from the details and heads of a bill collected and digested under the auspices of Earl (then Mr) Grey, by the Society of the Friends of the People in 1793. It is also believed that the first draught of the bill of March 1831 contained a clause permissive of, or else enacting, "vote by ballot," which was strongly pressed by Lord Durham, whose reforming principles out-went those of the rest of the cabinet. This, however, was vehemently opposed by Lord Brougham and the majority of the ministry, who also insisted on a £20 franchise for cities and boroughs. In order to retain the £10 franchise, Lord Durham was compelled to sacrifice the vote by ballot, of the necessity for which his own experience (as Mr Lambton) had fully (he said) convinced him.

The first impression which the bill made upon the opponents of ministers in the House of Commons was, that it was utterly impossible to pass such a measure, and that it must ruin the ministry. So prevalent was this notion on the evening of the first of March, that when Lord John Russell read out of Schedule A the names of the close boroughs which he proposed to extinguish, the list was received with shouts of laughter and loud derisive cries of "hear, hear," from the members who sat for the condemned places. When, however, the enthusiasm with which the bill was hailed, especially in the northern English counties and towns, and in Scotland, became known, this feeling changed, and anger took the place of derision. Sir Robert Peel did not address the House until the third night of the debate; and the tone of his speech proved that he had estimated the violence of the torrent of public opinion more truly than many of his party had done. The speech of the right honourable baronet on this occasion was as usual cool, logical, astute, and ingenious, though not innocent of some inconsistency. The outline of the argument of Sir Robert, who followed Lord Palmerston, was as follows, beginning with the ominous East Retford proceeding:—

"My noble friend (Viscount Palmerston) says, that if in 1828 we had consented to transfer the elective franchise from the borough of East Retford to the town of Birmingham, there would not have been the least necessity for agitating at the present moment the question of parliamentary reform, for that would have satisfied the country. What? Would my noble friend himself have rested satisfied with the existing state

of the representation, notwithstanding the five grand defects which he has just described as existing in it? Would my noble friend have rested satisfied to let so gross a system of corruption as that which he now finds it convenient to deplore, continue without any attempt to rescue the country from its so baleful influence?"

Alluding to certain menaces of dissolution of the House of Commons which had been thrown out, and to the disfranchising clauses and their schedules, Sir Robert thus proceeded:—

"I have further, sir, to complain of the menace of dissolution which has been thrown out, and by members of his Majesty's government. I shall not stop to inquire whether it is probable that such menace will produce its effect. For myself I care not for it. (Cheers, with some laughter.) I should be unworthy, sir, of a seat in this House if I suffered myself to be influenced by it. Dissolve parliament if you will. I care not much whether I am returned again, or whether I retire into the calm obscurity of private life. But if I did feel anxiety on this head, what would be my course? I would go to my constituents with your bill in my hand,—ay, and I would put forward as my most especial claim for a renewal of their confidence, my determined opposition to its enactments. I will go to a community which consisted, in 1811, of between 7000 and 8000 persons; I will go to a borough which, whatever may have been the case in 1821, in 1831 contains above 4000 souls; and I will tell my constituents, 400 or 500 in number,—many of them not paying a rent of £10, but having votes as resident householders paying church and poor rates; I will tell them that this bill, brought in without proof or even argument of its necessity, as far as it concerns them, I opposed to the uttermost extent of my power. I will tell them I did my utmost to preserve to them the privilege they at present enjoy; and which, sir, the humblest of them never abused

by the solicitation or acceptance of a bribe. (Cheers on both sides.)"

This was very adroit as an answer to any threat of dissolution; but as regards the proposed reform, it cuts both ways. If "scot and lot voting" worked so virtuously at Westbury or T[redacted] why should Sir Robert object to i[redacted] other [redacted] which might be just as wise and as honest? After some remarks, much of the nature of truisms, as to the "right" of any individual member to object to this particular bill, and some quotations from tracts or speeches written and spoken by Lord John Russell, which merely constituted an *argumentum ad hominem* of no value to the House, Sir Robert then proceeded, amidst significant marks of attention from all quarters of the House, to assure his auditors that he was not, as generally supposed, an enemy to all and every species of reform in the representative system.

"I could not (continued Sir Robert) have proposed reform as a minister of the crown. I deprecated the agitation of such a question at the instance of the crown. But having left office, and being reduced to the station of a private individual, I was then at liberty to take other views of this subject. I have to balance this danger of moderate reform against the monstrous evil of perpetual change in the executive government of the country; and I do not now hesitate to avow that there *might have been* proposed certain alterations in our representative system, founded on safe principles, abjuring all confiscation, and limited in their degree, *to which I would have assented.* (Cheers from the ministerial, answered by counter-cheers from the opposition benches. I see a smile on the faces of honourable gentlemen opposite.) I assure you, sir, I

am speaking with the utmost unreserve and sincerity. I have never conferred upon this point—(hear, hear, hear)—upon my honour—(cheers from both sides) with any individual whatsoever. I am not stating this, I say, as an indication of any other plan which I have to propose. I am stating the course merely which as a private individual I should take, and as one who has a deeper interest in the prosperity of this country than I could possibly have in any return to an official position. But in this plan, which proceeds upon a principle so extensive as to amount, in the phrase of the noble lord himself, to a "reconstruction" of the House of Commons, I cannot concur. Nay, I so wholly despair of modifying its provisions that, when the time shall come, my only alternative will be to offer my positive dissent from the whole measure proposed.

* * * * * *

Sir, the arguments of the noble mover, if they are good for anything, are arguments against accepting this as a final change. We must, according to this method, proceed still further. The noble lord said—with some inconsiderate frankness, as I think—that he found the constitution of this country in the 25th Edward I., and the statute '*de Tallagio non concedendo.*' The constitution of England in the reign of Edward the first! And what did he find there? That no taxes could be imposed without the consent of the whole commonalty of the realm (hear); and therefore, says the noble lord, 'if this be a question of right, as I contend it is, the right is on the side of the reformer.' These are the noble lord's own words. But if it be a question, and if the right be on the side of the reformer, why, I must ask, does the noble lord limit the franchise to particular districts and to particular classes? Why does he confine the right of voting to persons who rent houses rated each at ten pounds a-year?"

Again, alluding to the proposed extinction of the class of free burgesses, after the decease of the present

generation of this class of voters, Sir Robert continued as follows:—

"I think it an immense advantage in the present system that there is not at present any class of persons, however humble, which is not entitled to a voice in the election of representatives. I admit that I think this system would be defective if it extended further (hear, hear); but, at the same time, I consider it an inestimable advantage that there is not any class who can say they are without some voice in the choice of representatives of the people in this House. I admit, undoubtedly, that if I had to choose betwixt two modes of representation, and two only, and if it were put to me whether I should prefer that which would send the hon. member for Windsor, or that which would return the hon. member for Preston, I should (no doubt of it) prefer that by which the member for Windsor would be returned. But I am in no such dilemma as this (hear), and am at perfect liberty to protest against a principle which excludes altogether the member for Preston. I, sir, deem it a great advantage that the class which includes the weavers of Coventry and the pot-wallopers of Preston has a share in the privileges of the existing system."

This was very adroit, and unquestionably hit the vulnerable heel of the first bill of reform. After lengthened remarks on the numerous brilliant men who had sat for nomination boroughs, and on the triumphant manner in which the British people had passed through periods of revolution and confusion elsewhere, the honourable baronet thus continued:—

"I lament—deeply lament—the time which has been chosen to introduce this measure. It is brought forward at a period of great excitement, when men are scarcely sober judges of the course which it is fitting to pursue. This has always been

the case with reform. It has been uniformly brought forward, either at times of domestic calamity, or when the agitations of other states had infected us with a temporary enthusiasm for what was considered to be the cause of liberty. Look at the great periods of commercial or of agricultural distress. You will almost invariably find reform in parliament proposed as the *panacea* for distress, and finding favour just as long as the distress endured. If you find a debate on 'parliamentary reform,' be assured that 'some dire disaster follows close behind!'"

The honourable baronet thus concluded:—

"It was the duty of the king's government to abstain from agitating this question at such a period as the present; to abstain from exciting throughout the land that conflict (God grant it may be only a moral conflict!) which must arise between the possessors of existing privileges, and those to whom they are meant to be transferred. It was the duty of the government to calm and not to stimulate the fever of popular excitement. They have chosen a different course. They have sent over the land the firebrand of agitation, and they cannot now recall it. Let me hope, sir, that there are limits to their powers of mischief. They have, like the giant enemy of the Philistines, lighted three hundred brands, and scattered over the country confusion and dismay; but God forbid that they should, like him, concentrate in death all the energies that belong to life, and signalize their own end by bowing to the earth the pillars of that sacred edifice which contains, even by their own admission, within its ancient and venerable walls 'the noblest society of freemen in the world.'"

After a protracted debate, the bill was allowed to be brought in and read a first time without a division. The second reading, which was moved by Lord John Russell on the 21st March, and carried by a majority

of one only, convinced every one that some extraordinary crisis was now at hand. It became absolutely certain that no bill resembling that before the House could be carried through it; and it was equally indubitable that, in the then temper of the country, no measure of reform less comprehensive, whether to be proposed by a Grey or Peel cabinet, would be endured for an instant, so determined were the people to obtain the measure which had been offered them. Consequently, there remained only two alternatives,—a dissolution of the reforming ministry, or a dissolution of parliament. Under these impressions, the ministers seem to have resolved to go on with the bill until some blow was struck which would justify a dissolution, and then to dissolve. The opposition were not long in giving them the wished-for opportunity. The 18th of April had been fixed for going into committee upon the details; which, having been moved, General Gascoygne, one of the members for Liverpool, moved, as an amendment, "that it is the opinion of this House that the total number of knights, citizens, and burgesses returned to parliament for that part of the united kingdom called England and Wales, ought not to be diminished."

There can exist no doubt that this was intended, by both its mover and its supporters, as the likeliest means to baffle the entire measure; and it was accordingly supported not only by the entire Tory party, but by various other members who, like General Gascoygne, professed to be favourable to the principle of reform, but who, under shelter of disapproving of

the diminution of the whole representative body, voted for it in hopes of quashing a bill, of the ultimate effects of which they were in great though secret dread. It was supported by Sir Robert Peel, who, in a speech of great art, and upon technical grounds, though without concealing his disapprobation of the whole bill as it stood, argued against any diminution of the number of members constituting the House of Commons. In the course of this address, however, Sir Robert, whilst he confessed at the outset his strong dislike of the ministerial measure, took care to reiterate his willingness to support some measure of reform in the representation, which he did in the following fashion :—

"The noble lord opposite has said that there are but two opinions entertained on this subject,—those of Earl Grey and the Duke of Wellington. Certainly, after that declaration, I ought to be convinced that the respect for the aristocracy is not yet at an end! On the one side is Earl Grey, who assisted in framing this bill. On the other is the Duke of Wellington, who disclaims all reform. And then we are told that we must subscribe to one of these two opinions—that of Earl Grey, or that of the Duke of Wellington! We are not at liberty to entertain a qualified opinion of our own. Nothing, sir, certainly can be more *convenient* than to hold that there are but two authorities on this question. (No, no.) I listened to the noble lord with great attention, and I never was more mistaken in my life if I did not hear him say that Earl Grey was for reform, and the Duke of Wellington against it; and that there was no resting-place between these two authorities. The clear inference is, that we must take the bill of ministers, or adhere to the opinion ascribed to the Duke of Wellington.

"Well then, sir, how does the matter stand? We are in-

vited to consider this bill in a committee, and yet we are told we must subscribe to the opinions of Earl Grey, or to those of the Duke of Wellington! Now, supposing a person to have agreed with Lord Grey on this subject last year, are those who oppose the present measure to be interdicted from adopting the opinion which Earl Grey himself held last year? (Hear, hear.) And when mentioning his name, may I be allowed to express my sincere conviction that there is no man of higher honour, no person of greater integrity to be found in all this country. But, sir, I well know—for I heard it from the noble earl himself—that, at the close of last year, the measure of reform contemplated by him was of a more moderate nature (no, no); yes! far more moderate than that now proposed. The present Lord Chancellor, too, said the same thing! Now, it is rather hard that we are to be told by the noble lord that there are two pinnacles between which there is a great gulf, or, in other words, that there exists no middle course; but that we are now interdicted from even entertaining opinions which Earl Grey and the Lord Chancellor also entertained at the close of last year!"

All those who voted against the second reading of the bill voting for this amendment, and some few who had supported the second reading also voting for it, the amendment was carried by a majority of eight. The evident and immediate consequence of this vote was either a dissolution of the government or of the parliament. In the existing state of excited exasperation in which the nation then was, the first alternative was not to be thought of by sane men; yet there is not wanting evidence that a portion of the opposition deemed it practicable to drive the ministry from power, and either quash the question of reform entirely, or neutralize it by some evasive measure.

This determination to drive affairs to extremities, and test the courage of the ministers by leaving no alternative other than resignation or else an appeal to the country, soon evinced itself.

On the 21st April, Mr Benett, one of the members for Wiltshire, after a speech in which he charged the electors (freemen) of Liverpool with the practice of gross open and universal corruption in the sale and purchase of votes, moved that the system of corruption prevalent at Liverpool "deserved the attention of the House." This motion was founded upon the report of a Committee of Enquiry, which affirmed, after hearing of evidence on the part of the committee, that these practices existed at Liverpool to a considerable extent. Upon this, under the circumstances inopportune, motion, a long debate ensued, in which the question before the House was soon forgotten, and the merits and demerits of the reform-bill, which the ministers had now determined to withdraw, were fiercely canvassed. This irregular debate was prolonged to a late hour, apparently to give the opponents of ministers time to heap upon them every reproach that could be clothed in parliamentary language,—and when the hour of one o'clock arrived, Mr William Bankes, not satisfied with what had been done, moved an adjournment of the debate, which, in spite of the resistance of the Chancellor of Exchequer, was carried by a majority of 22 against ministers. This was decisive: dissolution or resignation was now to follow; and, notwithstanding Sir Robert Peel's arguments, drawn from former usage, against the dissolution of a parliament

so recently called together, the cabinet determined upon the first-named course.

The first crisis of the reform-bill had now arrived. It was rumoured currently over London, on the morning of the 22d of April, that a dissolution of the parliament was to take place; but to this was added a report of great reluctance on the part of the king to sanction this decisive step, without which it was manifest that the ministers must retire and yield their places either to the open or the covert enemies of all reform held to be deserving of the name. The agitation of the metropolis, under these singular circumstances, was excessive. All the avenues of the two Houses were thronged, at an early hour, with groups of persons eagerly awaiting the event, who, as the time approached for his Majesty coming to the House of Lords, became a dense multitude; and as the various members of the two Houses began to assemble, those who were known to be advocates of reform were loudly cheered, whilst its opponents were received with demonstrations which all the efforts of the police and military, stationed to keep the avenue clear, could not check, much less suppress. Within the Houses the scenes that occurred were without a parallel. Curiosity had drawn to the House of Lords a throng of peeresses, as well as of strangers of high rank, who eagerly awaited the assembling of the Peers. Towards three o'clock, the Lord Chancellor took his seat, and the Duke of Gordon immediately presented a petition against the reform-bill, when the Lord Chancellor again left his seat and with-

drew, apparently anxious to receive the King, whose arrival was every moment expected. Lord Mansfield immediately moved that the Earl of Shaftesbury do take the chair, and Lord Wharncliffe was proceeding to address their Lordships, when the Duke of Richmond moved that the standing order be read which directed that every Peer should occupy his accustomed seat. On this, Lord Londonderry and Lord Lyndhurst rose at the same time, accusing the Duke of Richmond of "disorder;" and a scene of confusion ensued, during which nothing that was said could be accurately taken down. At length, Lord Wharncliffe, having obtained a hearing, read a motion deprecating any dissolution of parliament at that moment, and was preparing to speak upon it, when the Lord Chancellor, having again taken his seat, addressed the House with great emphasis, exclaiming, "I never yet heard that the crown ought not to dissolve parliament when it thought fit;—particularly at a moment when the House of Commons has thought fit to take the extreme and unprecedented step of refusing the supplies!"

At this moment, the confusion in the House again became excessive, many of the Peers cheering the Lord Chancellor's speech and others calling out,—"The King!"—"The King!" in the midst of which Lord Brougham again left the woolsack; the distant sound of the artillery and shouts of the people outside, which were distinctly heard within the House, announcing that his Majesty was at hand. The Lord Chancellor's departure was followed by shouts of

"Shame shame!" "Order order!" and hootings of the most violent description, together with numerous individual altercations amongst the Peers; in the midst of which Lord Shaftesbury resumed his seat on the woolsack, and Lord Mansfield consumed the few minutes that remained in predicting ruin, spoliation, and anarchy, to arise from the course which ministers were now pursuing.* This address was cut short by the entrance of the King, and by the rush to the bar of the members "of the House of Commons, who, at the call of the Usher of the Black-rod, had emerged from a similar scene."

On the Speaker taking the chair at the usual hour, Mr Hodges, one of the members for Kent, presented a petition from Woolwich in favour of reform; on which Sir Richard Vyvyan rose, and after a severe reprobation of the course the ministers had taken, concluded by saying that it was of no use standing on form at that time, the question simply was this—"Is parliament to be dissolved or not?" Sir Francis Burdett having risen to order, the Speaker decided that Sir Richard Vyvyan's discourse was quite relevant enough to be in order! This being denied by Mr Tennyson, the Speaker repeated his decision; on which the honourable member rejoined "though you

*That the Peers pursued the Lord Chancellor with "hootings" is distinctly stated by Thomas Moore in his diary,—a statement which, if not strictly correct, would have been omitted or altered by Lord John Russell, the editor of Moore's diary, to whom all the circumstances must be accurately known. Mr Moore, who, with all his genius, had much of effeminacy about him, seems to have been one of the many whom the Reform Bill heartily frightened.

gainsay it, sir, I state it still. I repeat, it is most disorderly and most unconstitutional for any member to say that "the question with this House is whether it shall be dissolved or not!" This contradiction gave rise to a scene of confusion and cries of "Chair; order; and bar!" which lasted several minutes. Sir Richard Vyvyan, at length being allowed to resume, continued his diatribe against the administration and their bill, which, should it ever become law, would, he asserted, "shake the crown from the head of the sovereign!"

At the conclusion of this sentence, the reports of artillery, echoing through the House, drowned the voice of the honourable member for Cornwall, who continued upon his legs vainly attempting to make himself heard, in the midst of the repeated salvoes of cannon, every one of which was followed by loud cheers within and without the House, the King having at this moment arrived at the House of Lords. A comparative pause having, at length, ensued, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Althorp, and Sir Francis Burdett rose at once, which gave rise to another interval of the most extraordinary description, each of the three members vainly endeavouring to obtain a hearing, amidst a noise which effectually prevented any one from being heard. After several minutes, the Speaker was allowed to state that "Sir Robert Peel first caught his eye; but, Lord Althorp having moved that Sir Francis Burdett be heard, *that* was the question before the House." On hearing this decision, which was given by the Speaker under much

agitation, Sir Robert Peel said "then I speak to that question;" and raising his voice to the uttermost, to be heard above the tumult that prevailed, proceeded, evidently in a state of very natural excitement, to address the House.

"The rules, under which this House has acted for centuries, (said Sir Robert Peel,) are not, it seems, to be the rules of a reformed parliament! The House had that day seen an example of a defiance of all regular authority even from those seats which were occupied by the ministers of the crown. He was not there to complain of the dissolution of that House. He complained of the manner in which it was done. He did not however, and should not despond like his honourable friend the member for Cornwall. He had better hopes of England. He should not advise his countrymen to sit with their hands before them patiently expecting the confiscation of their funded property! He had more confidence in the good sense, intelligence, and just appreciation of men's characters of the English people; and he knew that if they religiously united, (and he knew they would unite in a just cause,) there would be no fear of a successful issue of that struggle into which they were now entering. (This sentence was followed by loud cheers and counter-cheers from both sides of the House, which were responded to from without, mixed with groans and loud exclamations of "Bar! bar!")

"Was this decency, or liberty of speech? was it fairness to produce confusion, under the mask of calling for order? If this were a foretaste of that which was destined to come, he might well beseech them to beware of their "reformed" parliament! He would tell them what would follow when that parliament was established. If, he repeated, they should ever carry that bill which the ministers had now proposed, they would, by that act, set up the vilest and worst of despotisms,—the despotism of demagogues. They would set up the despotism

of journalism;—that despotism which had, even now, reduced countries, lately flourishing and contented, to confusion, ruin, and despair. When he looked at Ireland—especially at the western counties of that kingdom, where rebellion had all but hoisted its standard—where landed proprietors, well affected to the state—were absolutely bereft of protection, and compelled to fly with their families to the shelter of the towns, to escape with their lives from lawless marauders who pillaged in open day—he confessed he wanted words to express his astonishment at the conduct and course adopted by the government! Instead of coming there to ask for new laws, strong enough to vindicate outraged law and authority, what did they do? They advised the King, at such a crisis, to dissolve his parliament; and this to protect themselves from that just loss of power which was coming upon them. If the crown was so easily influenced—or its independence so far extinguished—it ceased to be an object of interest to enter into such a service. He could indeed perceive, and with sorrow, that the power of the crown *had* ceased. This dissolution was to preserve a set of ministers in their places; and they had already established their character in the eyes of the country, during the short period of their office, for more reckless incapacity than was ever exhibited by any set of men who held power, at any time, in England. Their course was an example of that which was followed by all governments who called themselves 'liberal.' They had tossed on that table some bills—a game-bill and an emigration-bill—and having framed them upon what they called 'liberal principles,' they tossed them there and—abandoned them to their fate. What then could be done——"

Here Sir Robert Peel's voice, which he had strained to its utmost pitch of energy, was at once drowned by a vehement burst of exclamation of "Order! order!" and "Bar! bar! bar!" He still, however,

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continued to address the House, evidently exasperated "to the very top of his bent," but totally unheard,—until the Usher of the Black-rod actually appeared at the bar, and, summoning the lower House to the bar of the Peers "by command of his Majesty," closed a scene unlike all or any that had occurred within these walls since the dissolution of the long parliament by Cromwell.

It has been very currently asserted, though probably with more or less of rashness, that the party of Sir Robert Peel were deeply and justly disappointed by the tone and nature of his speech when the introduction into the House of the reform-bill took place. Many persons believed, or affected to believe, that, if Sir Robert, instead of yielding the principle, had boldly opposed the very idea of change, so many would have deserted the ministry that they and their friends over all the country must have succumbed under the reaction so excited. Such persons in all probability judge very unadvisedly. Sir Robert did not speak until the third night of the debate. This gave him some time and opportunity to observe and calculate the effect of the bill upon the spirit of the nation; and few men, of any age or period, have ever estimated the force of public opinion with so much correctness as Sir Robert Peel, or have observed its mutations with a more foreseeing sagacity. Few, now, will be inclined to deny that Sir Robert Peel judged rightly. That he nourished some faint hope that the excited and suffering people might be induced to acquiesce in some measure of reform, much

short of that proposed, seems certain. But he must have seen that the day was gone by for resisting the principle, either by the force of logic or the more potent weapon of ridicule. The national distress was too onerous and too continuous to allow of a hope that the sufferers could forget the only remedy that seemed to them possible at once and sufficient; and to obtain that remedy five-sixths of the whole population of these kingdoms were now fully determined. To such a resolve unmixed resistance was as useless as it was hopeless; and this no statesman knew better than did Sir Robert Peel. He was well aware that to oppose a solid wall to such a tempest only increases the ruin. The hurricane mounts over it, and sweeps the other side with redoubled fury; whilst a yielding hedge, which, whilst it stops a part, lets another part pass, allays the fury of the blast and affords a partial shelter to all behind it. Had he and the Duke of Wellington acted upon this wise principle in 1829, when it was asked to give the franchise of the rotten borough of East Retford to the great town of Birmingham, the question of reform would have assumed another shape, and a shape much less formidable. The time for minor concessions was, however, now over; and the general election was to decide the fortunes of England, probably for centuries to come.

CHAPTER III.

Results of the General Election of 1831—Desperate Efforts of the Ministerialists—Their Success—Meeting of Parliament—Angry Discussions of the Peers—Sir Robert Peel admits a Reform to be inevitable—His Evasions as to the Causes of Distress—Second Reform-bill—Second Reading 4th July—Bill carried up to the Peers—They peremptorily reject it—Riots at Nottingham—Lord Ebrington's Motion of Confidence in Ministers carried—Cautious Opposition of Sir Robert Peel—Parliament is prorogued—Sir Charles Wetherell—Bristol Riots—Parliament meets in December—Reform-bill again brought in—Second Reading powerfully opposed by Sir Robert Peel—The Russo-Dutch-Loan Debate—Sir Robert condemns Ministers—Reform-bill passes—Sir Robert Peel attacks Lord Durham—His exaggerated Predictions—The Peers read the Bill a second Time—Ministers beaten in Committee—They resign—The Duke of Wellington assumes the Reins of Government—Sir Robert Peel refuses to join him—Consternation and Rage of the Ministerialists—A violent Run for Gold—It is increased by Placards—Total Want of Confidence—Restoration of the Whigs—The Bill becomes Law—Sir Robert Peel's Explanation as to his Conduct—Exaggerated Views of this Event.

THE general election of 1831 entirely fulfilled the expectations of the ministry. Upon the exertions of the people at large it now manifestly depended whether a reform-bill, of the character of that withdrawn, was or was not to become law. Against the

pervading influence of the aristocratical class it was clear that no minister, unless zealously backed by the commonalty, including the middle and lower classes, could possibly carry such a bill. This the people of the united empire, however, clearly saw and understood. The directors of the periodical press, aware that the peril of rejection was infinitely worse than any that could arise from the success of the measure, were almost unanimous in favour of the reformers; and they did not do their work by halves. Free as the periodical press of England had, for some time, been, it never had approached the degree of license exercised on this exciting occasion. Against the close-borough system a fire was kept up, without intermission, which nothing could withstand; and the people were urged to make use of any or all of the means left them to shake off the incubus, and to drive from the hustings any man who dared longer to plead for it.

To this call all the productive classes more or less responded, for all were suffering. The working-classes were unanimous on the subject. They had two hopes to encourage them; one, that measures would be taken to alleviate their condition; another, that the holders of the new franchise would open the door for those still shut out, and a universality of suffrage in due time follow. Urged on by these anticipations, and by the excitement of the addresses to their hopes and their passions with which the periodical press teemed, the people kept no measures with their opponents, and where peaceable means were denied,

intimidation and coercion were openly resorted to. In the counties, the influence of the dominant landlords was set at nought and defied; and in the towns the pervading torrent of opinion swept all former usages, good or bad, before it. The results of such a state of feeling could not be doubtful.

In the metropolis four members, pledged to the bill, were returned, Mr Ward, who opposed it, resigning in fear. In Southwark, Sir Robert Wilson, who had supported General Gascoygne's amendment, was deserted, although an advocate of reform, and expelled. From Liverpool General Gascoygne himself was driven by universal acclamation. Liverpool was a notoriously corrupt borough: but even in Liverpool bribery for once was powerless, and influence had no voice that would be listened to. In Cornwall, one of the strongholds of the great Tory party, Sir Richard Vyvyan was beaten; and, in Kent, Sir Edward Knatchbull, an influential member of the high Tory section, resigned in utter despair. In Northumberland the influence of the Duke of Northumberland was totally neutralized. Mr Bell, who was emphatically the ducal member, after some days of useless canvass, yielded to the storm and retired, making way for Lord Howick, son of the Premier. In Yorkshire four candidates, pledged to the bill, were returned without an attempt at opposition; and in Cumberland the immense influence of the Lowther family failed utterly, Lord Lonsdale being able, after every effort, to return only a single member. In Scotland, where the system of nomina-

tion was almost universal, intimidation and violence were openly resorted to, and in many cases with success. The end was held, for once, to justify the means. The convenient doctrine was broached that men, whose peaceable privileges were withheld, must have recourse to the means which nature left them, and force was resorted to where votes were denied. At Newark even, no candidate connected with the Duke of Newcastle could be elected. In the hundred of Basset-law (East Retford) the result was the same. In the Scotch district of Haddington a town-councillor was put forcibly into a chaise and carried off, until the nomination ended in favour of the popular party; and at Dumbarton, Ayr, and Wigan, in Lancashire, scenes of outrageous violence took place, in consequence of the public exasperation. The result accorded with the determination of the mass of the people, which, in England, is irresistible when roused. Both in the counties and in the towns, a large majority of members, pledged to the ministerial measure, obtained seats; and the House of Lords remained the sole breakwater left between the surges of popular impulse and a partial destruction of the system of close boroughs and the government of a few.

Although, however, the popular exertions had been triumphant in returning to the House of Commons a large majority pledged to support the king's government, this, by no means, assured them of the success of the reform-bill. It was known that the House of Peers was, in the main, steeled against the measure. It was known that the influence of the greater body

of landed proprietors, of the greater part of the church, and of the military and naval services, would still be active in opposition. Further measures were, consequently, by the more determined reformers deemed necessary: and before Parliament was assembled, they were set about and in partial operation. It was felt that a measure, which so directly struck at the political influence of the House of Peers, must not be left to an unsupported majority even of the House of Commons. It was felt that active and visible support was requisite to success; and it was resolved that this should be given by the formation, in all populous towns, of "political unions," after the model of that of Birmingham, each of which should extend its organization as far as possible over the adjoining counties.

This movement, in the then temper of the population, was speedily accomplished; political unions sprung up, in greater or less strength, everywhere. Few large towns were without one. In the metropolis, in the borough of Southwark, in Manchester, in Liverpool, in Leeds, in Leicester, in Norwich, in Bristol, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in Edinburgh, in Glasgow, in Paisley, in Greenock, in Dundee, and various other English and Scottish seats of population, these bodies were combined and regularly constituted; most of them taking the opinions of eminent counsel as to the legality of their rules and lines of action. It is not exceeding the bounds of truth to say that, in all probability, the numbers, organized by, or in connexion with, these unions, were not less than a million of persons. That, by

the tone they gave to public opinion at that period, they assisted the ministry to get through the arduous struggle which awaited them, is palpable enough; but the loud complaints of intimidation made by the opposition, at that period, were very futile. Had the English population of 1831 possessed the military habits and discipline of their ancestors under the Plantagenets, this array would have been indeed formidable. But an insular position and the maritime defences of more modern times have altered all this; and it was ridiculous to suppose that any serious head could have been made against the regular troops then in the country by the most unwarlike populace in Europe.

The new parliament met for despatch of business on the 21st June 1831. The royal speech, which dealt in the usual topics, as matter of course recommended to the Houses the consideration of the reform question, which was the one engrossing topic of all minds. In the House of Peers the debate, or rather conversation on the address in answer to the speech, consisted of little besides irrelevancies or mere personalities, some of these quite unworthy of the House. Earl Grey was attacked because his son, Lord Howick, now one of the members for Northumberland, had been present at an election-dinner where the sheriff, who presided, had given as a toast "the people, from whom all sovereignty is derived;" and another peer complained that a member of the cabinet had, at another election-dinner, drank to the health of "the liberal clergy of the Church of England," and had

afterwards proposed the health of "the Dissenters." The Lord Chancellor, too, was complained of as having treated the House unceremoniously when his Majesty came down to dissolve parliament,—a charge which Lord Brougham very distinctly denied and disproved. An instructive sign of the times, however, displayed itself in the course of this somewhat disorderly debate, and that was the defection of Lord Winchilsea, who, after fighting the Duke of Wellington because he emancipated the Catholics, now repented and joined him to oppose the reform-bill, to the principle of which, in his anger, he had rashly given his adhesion. This opened the eyes of all as to the real temper of the Peers with regard to the measure on which the existence of the ministry rested, and was thus far of use to that ministry, teaching them, as it did, that nothing but considerations of the most powerful nature would ever induce the Peers to pass that reform-bill upon which the nation was now thoroughly bent.

In the House of Commons the conduct and speech of Sir Robert Peel were both of a conciliatory character. He did not oppose the address. He admitted, that although he was still opposed to the scheme of reform before the country, that the majority of the country was against him. As a side or flank attack, he drew attention to the difficulty in which Lord Palmerston was placed, who, being beaten at Cambridge, was now without a seat in the House of Commons,—it being impossible, as the honourable baronet sarcastically observed, that he should knock at the door

of any of those boroughs which he had assisted to class under Schedule A, although his ideas of their utility might perhaps have undergone some change. The major part of Sir Robert's address was, however, made up of explanations as to some of the circumstances which immediately preceded the hasty dissolution of the last parliament; and he concluded by admitting that "no one was more ready than he to allow that the country had been subjected to severe distress, and that on account of long wars and too lavish expenditure of public money the springs of industry had been crippled; but he would caution those who represented the people, and who had some power in influencing their opinions, against turning their attention from the real causes of their present distress to others which had no connexion with it. They were but too much disposed to look with suspicion on any government, and it would not improve their opinion of the present, if they found, in the end, that they had been deceived as to the real causes of their distress. He would admit, again, that public opinion was contrary to his opinion; but still he could not give up that opinion, because he thought that, by the course he was pursuing, he was consulting the true interests of the nation, and the time would come when the people might admit that those who now held these unpopular opinions were not the least faithful or least judicious advisers."

In this conclusion, it must be confessed, there is much studied ambiguity. If Sir Robert meant that a mere reconstruction of the House of Commons

could not in itself, and without reference to the measures to follow, cure widely-spread and deeply-rooted suffering in the nation, he was right. But he must have known that those by whom a reformed House of Commons was most ardently desired,—that is to say, the leaders of the Birmingham and most of the other great political unions,—went with him the whole length of his views as here expressed, and *did* attribute the general distress to inordinate taxation and a lavish expenditure. They went, however, one step further; and they attributed the severity of the pressure to that Act of 1819, of which he was the nominal author, which they both asserted and proved to have doubled the weight of that lavish expenditure to which he referred as the source of all evil. And, hence, with perfect consistency, they advocated that reconstruction of the representative system which Sir Robert deprecated, because they expected at the hands of a reformed House of Commons a remedy for the mischiefs of that mistaken measure, which it would, in their view, have been in vain to have looked for from any House of Commons elected under the existing system; inasmuch as it was, by the combined ignorance and arrogance of a House so constituted, that the enormous blunder and injustice of 1819 were perpetrated.

Setting aside this evasion, the tone of this speech of Sir Robert Peel was undoubtedly prudent because conciliatory. He spoke as one who partly anticipated a crisis in which his mediation between two extreme parties might possibly afford the only hope of a peaceful solution; and that this was his

feeling his after-conduct strongly proved, although the event was not precisely in accordance with the presentiment.

The motion for the introduction and first reading of the new reform-bill was made by Lord John Russell on the 24th June 1831. Of its provisions it is not necessary to say much, as most of them are now the law of the land. It avoided the error of the first reform-bill by maintaining the existing number of members, and thus obviating a fertile source of objection and cavil. The number of close boroughs totally disfranchised by it were fifty-seven. From forty others it took one member. It preserved the proposed ten-pound franchise for towns; but also wisely preserved the rights of the existing freemen, and privileged persons possessed of the franchise, in various boroughs,—the ten-pound franchise being superadded. By this prudent provision, another fertile source of objection was destroyed. Upon the whole, the reform-party either considered, or thought it advisable to seem to consider, the second bill as an improvement upon the first, and advocated it with a zeal proportioned to this view of it. Leave was given, without having recourse to a division, to bring in the bill.

On the 4th of July, the motion that the bill be read a second time came on, and was, although the result in the House of Commons was certain from the first, followed by lengthened debates. Sir Robert Peel was one of the last who spoke. He did so with his usual caution, but with the tone rather of a special pleader who is bound to make out the best case for his client,

than of a statesman who advocates that which he feels and knows to be both expedient and right. He admitted that some reform was now not only expedient but necessary; that the state of the representation was not such as to command the goodwill of the nation, or acquire the confidence of public opinion; and that he would aid to bring about any plan of moderate reform which should be brought before the legislature. The bill before the House, however, he honestly repudiated; and though now one of a very narrow minority, he, with some pain, asserted that he felt it his duty to oppose it to the last.

In some of his objections to the bill he was less happy than usual, and rather inconsistently complained of it for including some anomalies, when, instead of being an attempt at entire reconstruction, it only professed to be an effort partially to improve a system which he himself admitted to have been from the beginning irregular and anomalous. One characteristic passage occurred in the course of this address. Sir Robert defended the existing constitution of parliament by a reference to some of its acts as remarkable for wisdom and depth of information; but some of his auditory must have been unable to suppress a smile when, following out that policy to which, with regard to the blunders of 1819, he adhered through life, he, with that appearance of entire conviction which he knew so well how to assume, absolutely ignored all that had been done and said as to that Act, and referred to it as one of the monuments of the profound knowledge and admirable and equitable policy of the legislature!

Sir Robert concluded a speech, subdued in tone, abounding in art, but deficient in candour, by denying the unanimity of the public demand for reform, and deprecating the substitution of an untried scheme for a tried system, which he asserted to "combine personal liberty and security for property with a vigorous rule more completely than any system of government which the world had seen." On a division, the result of which was nearly ascertained beforehand, the second reading was carried by 367 against 231,—making a majority of 136.

In committee, every effort to delay and mutilate the bill, in the power of a minority to make, was put in force. One method was to gain time by perpetual motions for adjournment, upon which the House was divided; and in this certainly factious strife hours upon hours were wasted.

At last, however, it was felt that this method of proceeding gave rise to feelings of disgust and indignation out of doors too strong to be braved, and the unfair strategy was relinquished. It would fill a volume to chronicle the varied and injurious objections which were brought to bear against the different clauses of the bill, and against the schedules, as their contents were one by one discussed. Amongst other advantages of the close boroughs, Sir Robert Peel classed the power which the colonies thus acquired of sending members into the House of Commons charged to maintain their peculiar interests. The answer was, that if it were right, which was very doubtful, that any colony should be directly represented in that

House, it ought to be done openly, and by law; and that if colonists would avail themselves of this device, why might not foreign powers, to the absolute betrayal of the country through its own legislature? After a long conflict of some weeks' duration spent in this sort of bush-fighting, the bill was got through committee and read a third time; and on the House dividing on the question "that this bill do now pass," the ayes were 345, and the noes 236, leaving a majority for the bill of 109 votes.

This vote, one of the most important really that had occurred for a century, took place on the 21st September 1831. By it the House of Commons was pledged to a change greater than any that had taken place since the epoch of 1688, or perhaps greater than that; for although to ordinary apprehensions a change in the succession, effected by force, is a much more startling event, reflection may perhaps come to conclude that a change towards democracy in a representative system is, in its distant and ultimate effects, likely to be more deeply and permanently felt, and to turn out to be a matter of more vital importance to the millions whose welfare may be advanced or compromised by it. The closing address of Sir Robert Peel on this interesting occasion was more specious, but much less really logical and astute than was usual with him. He told the ministers, that, allowing the old constitution to be full of anomalies, they had only substituted one set of anomalies for another; and he could assure them, that in the end the "new anomalies" would be viewed with much less respect

than were the "old," just "as the peerages of Russell and Cavendish would command infinitely more consideration from the people than would a peerage bestowed upon himself even, if he were transferred to the House of Peers *to support the reform-bill!*" This was a shrewd hint as to the necessity, which was even now foreseen, of creating peers in order to pass the bill, and as to the probable estimation in which such mushroom creations would be held. But as an argument, it was self-destructive; for if it be once premised that there is nothing in anomalies to prevent their practical well-working, then it follows that the second set may, for aught that appears to the contrary, work even better than the first, and upon that all "respect" must ultimately rest.

The bill for reform was carried into the House of Peers on the 22d September by Lord John Russell, attended by upwards of one hundred members of the Lower House, who, when the bill was put into the hands of the Lord Chancellor by his Lordship, somewhat violated the decorum of the nobler house by cries of "Hear, hear, hear!" which were met by counter cries of "Order, order!" The bill was then read a first time without any opposition being made, and the second reading fixed for the 3d of October, on which day it was moved by Earl Grey, in a speech of great ability and power of argumentation. It must be owned that the conduct of the peers on this occasion was such as to prove that they were not prepared to treat the proposed bill in any way which policy or prudence would have dictated as advisable under such circumstances.

In fact, their opposition was not consistent with itself; and this want of consistence was calculated to throw a shade of suspicion upon the motives of those whose words and whose acts were in opposition to each other. As soon as Earl Grey had concluded, Lord Wharncliffe moved as an amendment, that "this bill be rejected," which amounted of course to a peremptory rejection of the whole principle, and involved the entire majority by whom it was carried in the denial.

This unceremonious amendment was carried by 199 against 158; that is to say, by a majority of 41, with the unlucky accompaniment that a considerable number of the peers who voted with the majority had, in their speeches, admitted the necessity of more or less of reformation. This ill policy was, beyond a doubt, the fruit of the extreme excitement of the period. The peers individually could not muster resolution to say that the representation needed no change. Even the Duke of Wellington suffered the iron of his character to be so far malleable as to explain that his celebrated declaration as to the absolute perfection of the existing usages was only made "as minister of the crown," and not as a private individual. When, however, it came to a division, the real feeling of the House was irresistible, and the bill was extinguished without even the ceremony of an ostensible examination in committee. The same feeling caused some of the opponents of the bill to divulge doctrines of an extraordinary nature as to the theory of the constitution.*

* One of the most extraordinary declarations was that of Lord Dudley. "He knew," said the noble Lord, "it was the theory of

Passion fairly mastered prudence; and, heedless of the adverse effect out of doors, the idea of popular government even the most moderate was treated with a contempt that was not more intemperate than ill-timed.

The summary rejection by the House of Lords of the bill of reform, the object of so much popular solicitude, was naturally received by the people with more or less of a feeling of anger. At Nottingham the populace broke out into serious riot, and set fire to a castle there because it was the property of the Duke of Newcastle, whose declaration of the right of "doing what he liked with his own" was not to be forgotten. At Derby also some excesses occurred. In the other parts of the kingdom no feeling was evinced but that of determination to have "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill,"—a formula of resolve which was echoed over the whole country. By the House of Commons equal determination was shown. On the fate of the reform-bill becoming known, Lord Ebrington had immediately moved for a call of the

our constitution that the two houses of parliament—the one possessing its privileges by inheritance, and the other elected by the people—were supposed to be equal in legislative power. That was the theory; but in practice, even with respect to the present House of Commons, it was not true. If that branch of the legislature were engaged in a struggle with the two others, it would prove too hard for both together. It was only by the 'abuses of the constitution,' as they were called, that the due balance was maintained, and the evils which would arise from the superiority of the popular branch prevented, or at least mitigated." Whatever may be thought of the truth of this strange avowal, as to its singular imprudence at that period, there cannot be two opinions. It was not then the time to throw "De Lolme" overboard.

House; and on the 10th of October, that call having taken place, his Lordship, after a speech, the tone of which was studiously moderate, moved a resolution of unabated confidence in the ministry, and adherence to the principle and to the leading provisions of the rejected bill.

This moderation of tone was not, however, exactly imitated by all the succeeding speakers on the ministerial side of the House. Mr Macaulay, in a powerful oration, advised the people to resist the payment of taxes if the proposed reform should be again baffled by the peers. Mr O'Connell said, a whole people, with the king at their head, must overthrow by any means—say, by the creation of eighty peers—the selfish resistance of a sordid oligarchy. Colonel Evans said, that if a government should be established which should endeavour to coerce the national sentiment, "he should be the first to draw the sword against it;" and Mr Thomas Duncombe, after saying he would not dare to trust himself to an "analysis" of the majority of anti-reforming Lords, who, he hinted, had obtained their peerages for anything but merit or desert, characterized them by a quotation from Defoe, which certainly sailed as near the "lee-shore" of the libel law as it was possible to do.*

After Colonel Evans had uttered his warlike sentiment, Sir Robert Peel rose, manifestly with the view

* "For wealth, however got, in England makes
Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes;
Antiquity and birth are needless here—
'Tis impudence and money make a peer!"

of throwing oil upon the now troubled waves of debate. His tone was, in fact, wisely conciliatory throughout, and his opposition was that of mere parliamentary technicalities, unmixed with anything like asperity or recrimination. He deprecated with great earnestness the hints as to the non-payment of taxes which had been thrown out; and, notwithstanding the pungent quotation from Defoe, went so far as to compliment Mr Duncombe on the "moderation" of his remarks! Sir Robert's great objection to the resolution proposed was, that it pledged its supporters to the details as well as the principle of the bill, which, he said, rendered further improvement out of the question. After earnestly deprecating the tone of the attacks everywhere made on the peers, whose privileges, Sir Robert added, were not for "personal vanity" but "public good," he somewhat *naïvely* concluded by saying:—"He did not like to trust himself on this topic of popular excitement; for when he considered the influence of government, he was persuaded, that if the same means were used to excite opinions against the peerage that had been employed on the subject of reform, it would not be difficult to produce a very strong dislike to it." Sir Robert finished by saying, that "as all the friends of the bill would probably vote for the resolution, so all who had opposed it were bound in consistency to vote against the resolution." On a division, there appeared—ayes, 329; noes, 198; majority for the resolution, 131.

The intent and effect of this motion, thus carried by a majority so decisive, were to preclude any chance

of resignation on the part of ministers. In point of fact, it "nailed the colours to the mast" on the part of the advocates of "the bill and the whole bill," and at once pledged the government and the resolute majority in the House of Commons, who supported them, to the entire measure as it then stood. The alternative chosen was, therefore, to prorogue parliament for a brief period, to prepare a bill similar in its clauses to that rejected by the Upper House, to be laid before the Commons as soon as they should be re-assembled, and to trust to the prudence or the apprehensions of the peers for their acquiescence in the measure. Nor can there exist any doubt that, at this period, this was the only eligible course. Any attempt to force another administration on the country would have inevitably issued in a general resistance to the claims of the tax-gatherer; and out of such resistance events yet more extraordinary must have sprung.

That this was Sir Robert Peel's view of the position of affairs his subsequent conduct gives every reason to believe. Indeed, he evidently wished the resolution of Lord Ebrington to pass the House, and very exactly anticipated the event of the division. The whole responsibility of the coming crisis was, therefore, once more transferred to the House of Lords; and with a view to bring this highly critical position of affairs as soon as possible to some *denouement*, the parliament was prorogued on the 20th of October, in order to give the ministry time to mature ulterior proceedings; the close of this stormy month being signalized by a dreadful outbreak at Bristol, connected with the re-

cordership of the eccentric and now unpopular Sir Charles Wetherell, in the course of which many lives and a vast mass of property was destroyed.

On Tuesday, the 6th of December, parliament was again assembled, and the question of reform again recommended, in pressing terms, to its attention in the speech from the throne. As a sop to the opposition, a sort of half-threatening notice of the political unions was also taken, though without naming them; the term "combinations" being used instead of the term "political unions," and the sentence being so worded as to render it doubtful whether it applied to the existing unions or not. The addresses, in answer to the speech, were passed in both Houses without dividing, a trifling amendment, suggested by Sir Robert Peel, being adopted by the Commons. The speech of the right honourable baronet on this occasion was temperate and cautious; being expressive of his readiness, candidly and calmly, to discuss any proposed measure of reform, whilst it complained of the popular odium thrown on all who opposed the former bills, especially on such peers as were patrons of boroughs, in whose perfect disinterestedness Sir Robert boldly announced his full and entire belief. This announcement by the right honourable baronet called forth a few derisive cheers from the opposite side of the House; but, upon the whole, the debate was conducted with calmness, and proved that the conviction of both sides was, that some considerable measure of reform must now pass.

On Monday, the 12th of December 1831, the re-

newed reform-bill was brought before the House of Commons by Lord John Russell. It did not differ very materially from its predecessor which was thrown out by the Lords. The preceding bill had, in accordance with General Gascoygne's motion, nearly preserved the entire number of members. This bill again fixed them at 658 in all, with some alteration of the apportionment to Ireland and to Scotland. It preserved the rights of the existing free burgesses over all the kingdom, and it retained the ten-pound franchise for towns. It proposed to extinguish fifty-six close boroughs, and it deprived of one member each thirty minor boroughs.

After a debate of some length, in a conciliatory spirit, the bill was brought in and read a first time, Sir Robert Peel, however, taking care to warn the House of his intention to oppose a second reading. That second reading was moved on the 16th December, and on the second and last day of the debate, Sir Robert redeemed his pledge, by opposing it in a long and powerful speech, the close of which was a confession of his consciousness that this opposition must be unavailing. A considerable portion of it was occupied in defending his own conduct on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and of the Catholic Disabilities; the rest, in arguing against the proposed measure, and predicting revolution to arise out of its success. Sir Robert thus concluded:—

"I will continue my opposition to the last, believing, as I do, that this is the first step not directly to revolution, but to a series of changes which will affect the property and totally

transmute the character of the mixed constitution of this realm. I will oppose it to the last, convinced that, although my opposition will be unavailing, it will not be fruitless, because the opposition now made will become a bar to further concessions hereafter. If the whole House were now to join in giving way, it will have less power to resist future changes. On this ground I take my stand; not opposed to any well-considered reform of any of our institutions that need reform, but opposed to this reform in our constitution, because it tends to root up the feelings of respect—the feelings of habitual reverence and attachment, which are the only sure foundations of a government. I will oppose to the last, Sir, the undue encroachments of that democratic spirit to which we are advised to yield without resistance. We may make it supreme. We may establish a republic—full of energy—splendid in talent, but, in my conscience, I believe fatal to our real liberty, our security, and our peace!"

The second reading was carried by 324 votes against 162, giving a majority of 162 — a result which ought to have at once taught the House of Peers the danger and impolicy of the course which they had pursued, and were still bent upon pursuing. Sir Robert Peel now openly declared that his opposition in the Commons House was not with any hope of preventing the bill becoming law, but with the view only of raising a barrier against future and greater concessions. This was the view which all reflecting men now took of the position of the question; the peers alone, unacquainted with the real force of the current of public opinion, and guided only by irritation, fear, or motives of interest, thought differently.

Whilst this renewal of the reform-conflict was in

progress, an occurrence took place so strongly indicative of that prostration before foreign powers which every minister after 1819 had exhibited, that it demands some notice, especially as Sir Robert Peel, on this occasion, acted a part at variance with his conduct subsequently on occasions somewhat similar.

The event alluded to was this. At the close of the war in 1815, the allies, having now supreme power in Europe, and desirous to curb, as tightly as possible, the power of France, constructed a new kingdom on her frontier by annexing Belgium to Holland, and creating the Dutch ruler King of the Netherlands. This act of power was odious in the extreme to the Belgians, to whom the Dutch were, and ever had been, objects of contempt and dislike. The races, in fact, are different in blood, manners, language, religion, and temperament. Belgium is essentially French. The language spoken is the French language, and the religion of the country is Catholic. The Belgians, in fact, like their neighbours the French, are a high spirited, warlike, and excitable people; and they hold their Batavian neighbours, the huxtering and plodding Dutch, in high disdain. To be forcibly put under the rule of these "dealers in cheese, gin, and herrings," was, therefore, naturally felt not only as an injury but an insult by the Belgian nation; and this dislike was naturally heightened into a bitter indignation when the Dutch king proceeded to tax them heavily, in order to pay the interest of a huge public debt, with the contracting of which they had nothing to do. Submission was, however, enforced; and thus the affair

remained until July 1830, when, encouraged by the revolution at Paris, the Belgians proceeded to throw off the sordid and base rule of the Dutchmen—an attempt in which they very easily succeeded. This separation, however, put the ministry of Earl Grey into a dilemma with Russia not easily to be got over.

As part and parcel of the settlement of 1815, the Dutch and English governments had engaged to repay Russia, on pretext of reimbursing the Czar for expenditure incurred on his part, a large sum in progressive instalments, advanced conjointly by the two powers; but these payments rested entirely on the permanence of the arrangement uniting Belgium to Holland, and were to cease and determine should any viscissitude in Europe again separate the Belgians and Dutch. This vicissitude had now occurred; and nothing could be clearer than the course now dictated both by policy and justice. The Dutch king acted without hesitation upon the clearly expressed sense of the convention or treaty in which these payments were covenanted; and the British public, as a matter of course, looked to the Whig cabinet to follow this example, when, to the surprise of many, and indignation of more, it came out in Parliament, that, in defiance of the express terms of the bargain, the Czar insisted upon a further *douceur* of some five millions sterling, to which the ministers, unwilling, in the midst of national distress and political incertitude, to subject themselves to the hostility of the Russian cabinet, were resolved to yield. This would have been, under any circumstances, sufficiently galling

to the British people; but at that moment it was doubly so.

The unfortunate Polish nation, encouraged by the overthrow of the old Bourbon dynasty and the retirement of the Duke of Wellington from power in England, had made another spasmodic effort to regain that national independence of which they had been so iniquitously robbed. In this struggle they had the sympathy of the British public, which was almost unanimous in their favour; and deep was the vexation when it was known that the Czar was actually using British money, to which he had no fair claim, to enable him to coerce the Polish nation. The subject was formally brought before the House of Commons by Mr C. J. Herries on the 26th January 1832; and the illegality of the whole proceeding strongly argued for by Sir Robert Peel, in opposition, not only to Lord Palmerston, but to the views of the Attorney and Solicitor General. The feeling of the House on this occasion was evidently hostile to the course taken by the ministry; and had the fear of compromising the reform-question not intervened, the division would have been a very critical one. As it was, the House only sustained the ministers by a majority of forty-four; and the fate of unfortunate Poland, whose subjugation this money helped to ensure, was soon forgotten in the hubbub of the conflict for the reform-bill. Whatever may have been the real motives of Sir Robert Peel on this occasion, few doubted the rectitude of his views; and it is only to be regretted that on a subsequent occasion, of a character yet

more grave,—that is to say, with regard to the illegal capture and confiscation by Russia of the British barque "Vixen," his conduct was different.

The reform-bill was read a third time on the 22d of March 1832, after a long oration in opposition from Sir Robert Peel, in which, having exhausted all his arguments against the measure, he dealt more in exaggerated predictions and elegant personalities than was usual with him. Alluding to the fact that the influence of Lord Durham had been exerted to retain, in all the bills, the most popular clauses, Sir Robert said,—

"It appeared as if the reins of the state had been confided to some youthful and inexperienced hands; and who, left without any guiding principle or any controlling sense of duty, were rushing on with headlong violence which wiser men could neither moderate nor restrain. If the older and more experienced members of the cabinet chose to confide the conduct of this dangerous measure to the care of their youthful colleagues, known and distinguished only for their rashness and presumption, they should have, at least, forewarned them of the difficulties they would have to encounter, the perils they would have to incur, and the fate that would probably await them! They should have said to any one of these persons, whose ambition made him press for an employment so fraught with danger to himself and injury to others,—

'——————— non est tua tuta voluntas.
Magna petis, Phäeton, et quæ nec viribus istis
Munera conveniant, nec tam puerilibus annis!'

They should have given him the salutary caution that the fiery steeds which he aspired to guide required the hand of restraint and not the voice of incitement—

'Sponte suâ properant; labor est inhibere volentes;
Parce, puer, stimulis, ac fortius utere loris.'

If the caution had not been given, or if it had been disregarded, let them hope, at least, that the example of their suffering might be a warning to others, and that another lesson to the folly and rashness of mankind might be read by the light of their conflagration."

By those who recollect that the first Lord Durham was son-in-law to the prime minister, and that, though scarcely younger than Sir Robert Peel himself, his appearance through life was remarkably juvenile and boyish, the exquisite keenness of this application of Ovid's lines will be fully appreciated.

The concluding words of Sir Robert's address again proved that he had made up his mind to the certainty that the bill must become law, and that further resistance could only be perilous to those who ventured to persevere in it. "I trust (said the right honourable gentleman) that in every vicissitude of public or private fortune, I may be enabled to cling to the consolation of having struggled, in this contest, with perseverance, and of having resigned it without dishonour, and under these feelings my last vote, like my first, shall be recorded against it." The lapse of a very few weeks sufficed to manifest how happy for the country was Sir Robert's just appreciation of the peril and difficulty of the situation.

On the 26th March 1832, the reform-bill was brought up to, and read a first time by, the House of Peers, without a division, but not without the House being warned by Lord Carnarvon, one of the bitterest enemies of the bill, that, if he could prevail, it should be thrown out a second time without the

courtesy of a second reading. As the violent feelings of Lord Carnarvon were known to be shared by a great number of peers, it was now apparent to the whole nation that it was on the verge of a political crisis, more hazardous than any that had occurred since the Revolution of 1688; and for this the people, as well as the House of Commons, were fully prepared. On the 9th of April, under these certainly not encouraging circumstances, Earl Grey moved "that the bill be read a second time," which, after a debate of four nights, was carried by a majority of nine only: after which result the Duke of Wellington entered upon the journals a long protest against the bill, to which were afterwards appended the names of 73 peers. In order that the peers might have ample time to consider the whole of the details, the motion that "the House should go into committee on the bill" was not made by Earl Grey until the 7th of May: and this motion brought on the closing crisis of this extraordinary struggle.

From the moment when the result of the division on the second reading of the bill by the lords became known, the ferment of public opinion grew more and more excessive. All men were thoroughly convinced that the bill, in its integrity, must either be carried by a *coup d'état*, or the ministers and the people of England must submit to take a castrated bill from the Tory majority of the peers; and this it was evident, to all who watched the signs of the times, the people would not do. An ill-advised expression of Earl Grey as to the ten pound clause, which was

popularly considered the marrow of the bill, gave rise to a suspicion that the ministers meant to yield this part of their measure to be altered by the hostile majority; and this suspicion was followed by demonstrations so unmistakable in their nature and import, and so universal, as to convince the Whigs that they must now either stand by the whole measure, or be abandoned by public opinion and left to the revenge of their enemies, who were now unquestionably irritated to the last degree by the alarming and galling position in which they were placed.

It was known, or at all events fully believed, that the ministers held a promise in writing from the King, that in case of absolute necessity he would create a sufficient number of additional peers to carry the measure. When, therefore, the bill went into committee, where it was known the hostile majority were prepared to mutilate it, the agitation of the country, and especially of the metropolis, became excessive, and expectation was wound up to the highest pitch. This suspense was not destined to endure long. On the evening of the 7th May the final collision was brought about, by means of an amendment moved by Lord Lyndhurst, the purport of which was to take the whole management of the bill out of the hands of the ministers, and which was carried, after a good deal of evasive speaking on the part of the opposition (for what intended it is not easy to say), by a majority of 35—the "contents" being 151, and the "non-contents" 116. This blow was one of life or death to the cabinet; and Earl Grey, to gain time to act, moved an immediate adjournment

for two days, which was consented to, very unwillingly, by the opposing peers.

All men, except those in immediate contact with the court and the ministry, now expected a creation of forty or fifty peers to take place. No man, who was really a friend to the English form of government, wished to see such a measure actually take place; but the question was now reduced to this: Shall a large majority of the people of England, backed by the king and a majority of the House of Commons, or a majority of 151 peers, prevail? From this final position the question could not be extricated; and as both parties were determined, the means of solution seemed only one; when, to the astonishment of all, and terror of most men, it became known that his Majesty, on the real state of the case being made known to him, shrank back, not unnaturally, from an ordeal so painful; that, in consequence, the ministry had tendered their resignations; that these were accepted; and that the government, *pro tempore*, centred in the Duke of Wellington, who, being sent for by the King, undertook to form a cabinet and extricate his Majesty at all risks from the "dead lock" in which events had placed him.

It would be next to impossible, were it necessary, to recapitulate in these pages the rage, the confusion, the fear, and the destruction of confidence, that this astounding news created throughout the kingdom. The conflict of opinion was as wild as it was remarkable. An open and avowed military government—a total destruction of all credit and universal stoppage—a civil war and revolution—and a parallel to the

recall of Neckar, in 1789, by a return of Earl Grey to power, were all canvassed, and anticipated as the dispositions of the different parties might incline them to hope or to believe. In all the great towns, which were the *nuclei* of political unions, public meetings were instantaneously summoned; and in a few hours petitions to the House of Commons to stop the supplies, and to pass resolutions declaratory of unlimited confidence in the government of Earl Grey, and of a total distrust in the intentions of the Duke of Wellington, were signed by hundreds of thousands, and sent off to London to be laid before the Commons. By the council of the Birmingham Union, a proclamation or manifesto was drawn up, declaring their intention to stand by the Grey ministry and urging the people to resist the Duke of Wellington, and any ministry formed under his auspices, by every constitutional means in their power; and this document was, in an incredibly short space of time, to be seen posted up in every town throughout the country, the people taking care that no one should molest those employed in the work of dissemination. In the House of Commons itself, the scenes that ensued were not less singular.

Upon the conduct of that House now manifestly rested the fate of the country. That was felt and acknowledged by every one within or without its walls. But, within its walls, it was more strongly felt than it possibly could be elsewhere, that the probable conduct of the House might, in a state of affairs so very extraordinary, be materially influenced by the conduct of one man—that man being Sir Robert Peel. It could

not be concealed—nor was it concealed—that within the House of Commons, as well as out of doors, ideas the most unfavourable of the views and intentions of those who had been most actively instrumental in bringing about the existing crisis, were entertained. Indeed by some, as far as the forms of debate would allow, they were expressed. To the validity or invalidity of these anticipations, and to the possibility or impossibility of the designs suspected being attempted to be carried into effect, it was felt that Sir Robert Peel's conduct would be as a touch-stone or a test; and the anxiety to place the right honourable baronet in a position in which he might properly allow his intentions to be ascertained, was extreme and overpowering.

To this suspense a period was put by Lord Ebrington, who lost no time in giving notice of a motion for an address to his Majesty, which should not only pledge the House to stand by the bill which it had passed, but also express full confidence in the ministers who proposed it, and a deep distrust as to the consequences of any present change in the cabinet.* The motion was debated on the 10th of

* "That a humble address be presented to his Majesty, humbly to represent to his Majesty the deep regret of this House at the change which has taken place in the councils of his Majesty, by the retirement of those ministers in whom this House continues to repose unaltered confidence: that the House, in conformity with the recommendation contained in his Majesty's gracious speech, has framed and sent to the House of Lords a bill for the Reform of the Representation of the People, by which they are convinced that the prerogatives of the crown, the authority of both houses of parlia-

May, and was opposed by Sir Robert Peel, chiefly on the ground that it amounted to a dictation to the crown as to the measures to be pursued—an assertion which the words of the resolution hardly bear out, they only pledging the House not, on their parts, to agree to any other bill essentially different from that just passed, a pledge which the crown might meet by a dissolution.

In this address, however, Sir Robert really put the country nearly at ease as to the ultimate event by the following expressions, which demonstrated clearly that he was determined not to accept office in *a pseudo-reform ministry*, a scheme which, without his aid, was seen and felt to be impracticable "The Crown, sir (said the right honourable baronet), acting upon these resolutions, would be compelled to say to any person who might be honoured by his Majesty's selection —'You must pledge yourself to carry these principles into complete effect before I can admit you into my service—no matter how pregnant they may be with danger to the country—no matter in what disputes

ment, and the rights and liberties of the people would be secured. That to the progress of this measure this House considers itself bound to state to his Majesty that his subjects are looking with the most intense interest and anxiety; and they cannot disguise from his Majesty their apprehension, that any successful attempt to mutilate or impair the efficiency of the bill, will be productive of great disappointment and dismay. That this House is, therefore, impelled by the warmest attachment to his Majesty's person, humbly but earnestly to implore his Majesty, to call to his councils such persons only as will carry into effect, unimpaired in all its essential provisions, that bill for reforming the representation of the people which has recently passed this House."

they may be sure to involve both houses of parliament!' *No man, sir, could, with any propriety of feeling, accept office on such terms.*" This was decisive as to Sir Robert Peel's line upon this trying occasion; and most persons concluded that this avowal on the part of Sir Robert, added to the triumphant success of the motion of Lord Ebrington, which was carried by a majority of eighty, would at once put an end to every attempt at the hopeless task of forming another cabinet, which must be in a minority in the existing House of Commons, and destitute of every chance of obtaining another more favourable.* Yet such was the extreme pitch to which the passions of both parties were wound up at this crisis, that, in spite of the significant warnings, and still more significant demeanour, of Sir Robert Peel, four perilous days seem to have been passed in imagining schemes, of which it is hard to say whether the madness or the mischief would have been greatest. It is quite certain that the real history of these agitated and tumultuous days

* After giving this memorable debate, the author of the *Political Register* thus emphatically concludes:—"The House, after a long debate, divided upon this motion, and the numbers were—288 for, and 208 against. There, then! the King has now *to dissolve parliament again*, or to find new ministers to carry on the government without supplies, or choose ministers that will pass the Reform Bill! I have no time for comment on the debate—I am compelled to go to press directly. I applaud the whole of this address except the words 'humble' and 'humbly,' which appear to me to be redundant. All the nation is in motion. There is a mental convulsion in the country. If the King have one single sincere friend on earth, he will go to him and implore him to take LORD GREY back to his councils immediately."—*Cobbett's Political Register*, *May* 12, 1832.

will never be written, although enough is known to demonstrate the pitch of extravagance to which some of the plans then in agitation pointed. For although it is quite certain that many persons still living could give evidence of an extraordinary character as to the nature of various communications made during the period of that brief crisis, that evidence can never be adduced except under the stress of judicial investigations which it is not the interest of either party to urge, and for which the time seems now to be passed.

The colour given to the transaction in the course of the explanations that followed, was, that the bill which Earl Grey, backed by the King, could not prevail upon the peers to tolerate, they were to be induced to pass, in all its integrity, by the Duke of Wellington. This gloss, however, neither the words nor the acts of that very extraordinary man will sustain; and we must, per force, come to the conclusion that some modified device was contemplated, as a compromise, which it was hoped the Commons might accept rather than risk a dissolution in such times.* It seems, indeed, almost impossible to account

* "I was called on to assist my sovereign in resisting a measure which would lead to the immediate overthrow of one branch of the legislature; a measure which was to enable the minister to carry through this House the whole bill, unmodified, unimproved, and unmitigated. I had then, my lords, only the choice of adopting *such part of that bill as this House might please to send down to the House of Commons, suffering the government hereafter to depend upon the operation of that part of the bill,* or else of suffering the whole bill to be carried, and the House of Lords to be destroyed. My lords, my opinion is *not* altered. *No part of the bill is safe. But undoubt-*

for the proceedings between the 10th and 14th of May, and for the evident alarm of the House of Commons, during that brief but critical period, without the aid of some such supposition. Every movement of Sir Robert Peel was narrowly watched, and no device left untried to force him to declare his real feelings. On the presentation of some petitions for reform on the 11th instant, Mr Duncombe elicited from Sir Robert a further declaration of neutrality. "I do not hesitate (said the right honourable baronet) to state that I stand here in a private capacity only. I also do not hesitate to declare that the rumour to which the honourable gentleman alludes, of my having accepted office under the Duke of Wellington, is wholly unfounded. The fact is, I have received no invitation from any person *authorized to make one*, to

edly a part of the bill is better, that is to say, less injurious, than the whole bill; and certainly it must be admitted, at least, that it is better than the destruction of the country, by the destruction of the constitution and of the independence of this House. Under these impressions, my lords, I gave my consent to assist his Majesty in forming an administration."—*Duke of Wellington's speech*, 17th May 1832.

That the duke had calculated upon "quieting" the impatience of the people by overawing the populous districts, was indicated by such military movements as then took place; and by the fact that not less than twenty-seven warrants for the apprehension of the leaders of the political unions, on charges of treasonable and seditious practices, were found in the Home Office, filled up but not signed, after the recall of Earl Grey. It is also well known that some of the pieces of artillery, sent down to the north by sea, stood for many days on the quays where they were landed, amidst the derision of the populace, who chalked upon them "Wanted an owner."

accept office. I therefore stand here in my private capacity; and it is because I so stand that I beg leave to implore the House, whilst it expresses its opinions on the great question that now occupies the public mind, to do so temperately." This declaration, which was received with loud cheers by the House, did not, however, either end uncertainty or allay alarm; but in the mean time symptoms began to exhibit themselves which must have convinced all but the unreasoning advocates of mere violence, that reaction was impossible, and that the very attempt must destroy that which it was meant to defend.

The temper of the army was known, in certain quarters, to be by no means to be totally depended upon; but this was of minor moment, compared with the movement which now began to take place on the part of the public, and which must have convinced the most senseless advocates of reaction of the utter rottenness of the ground on which they now stood. By the rash Cash-payment Act of 1819, the whole circulating medium, and virtually the whole public and commercial credit of the country, were made to depend upon a few millions of gold and silver, lodged in the vaults of the Bank of England. The year 1825-6, which was the period of the great commercial panic, sufficiently proved the folly of a system so pernicious to the minds of thoughtful men. The events of the nine days of May 1832 were destined to expose the weakness of such a system still more curiously. The cautious disclaimers of Sir Robert Peel on the 10th and 11th had in some degree quieted alarm within

the Commons House; but the country at large teemed with reports of the most exaggerated and extravagant nature as to the designs of the Duke of Wellington; and symptoms of want of confidence and commercial panic soon began to exhibit themselves. Men began immediately to withdraw their balances from the hands of their bankers. Notices of "withdrawal of deposits" were sent into the savings banks over all the country; and a slow and silent demand upon the banks for gold and silver coin was felt. In a day or two, notices were seen posted in the shop windows that "no sales except for specie" would be made; and the run upon the Bank of England became marked and alarming.

On Saturday, the 12th May, panic took the place of a less open distrust. The metropolis was covered with placards, circulated by numberless hands, bearing the emphatic words "To stop the Duke, go for gold;" advice which was followed as soon as given, to a prodigious extent.* On Monday the 14th instant, it being currently believed that the Duke of Wellington had formed a cabinet, the panic became universal; and the run upon the Bank of England for coin was so incessant that, in a few hours, upwards of half a million was carried off, and the alarm began rapidly to spread through the country.

* It is known that these placards were the device of four gentlemen, two of whom were elected members of the reformed parliament. Each put down £20; and the sum thus clubbed was expended in printing thousands of these terrible missives, which were eagerly circulated, and were speedily seen upon every wall in London. The effect is hardly to be described. It was electric.

In the evening, the House of Commons, where petitions to stop the supplies began to pour in, met in much agitation; and on Alderman Wood presenting a petition from the livery of London entreating the House "to stop the supplies," a desultory conversation on the critical state of the country began, which was continued to a late hour, and the uncertain purport of which added greatly to the alarm out of doors.

In the course of this debate, if debate it could be called, the run upon the bank, and the movement of troops for no ordinary apparent purpose, were pointedly alluded to; whilst Lord John Russell succeeded in again wrenching from Sir Robert Peel an avowal that he neither was nor would be connected with the new administration which Lord Carnarvon had announced in the other House, to be "all but formed." The shape of Sir Robert's disclaimer was singular; nor was its conclusion at all calculated to remove the misgivings now generally felt as to the issue of the crisis.

"If," said Sir Robert Peel, "the noble lord's inference is correct, that I feel unable to enter into the service of the crown, I will at all events add this to it, that I bitterly regret that, in the situation in which his Majesty is now placed, I am *not* able to accept office; and the greatest regret that attends my refusal of office is the possibility of affording an opportunity for sarcasm being pointed by contrast against those who feel themselves able to join the new administration. Whatever course my noble friend the Duke of Wellington may pursue—whether or no I may feel able to pursue that course too—this I will say, that I never felt a more perfect confidence in anything in my life than that that course, be it what it may, will

be dictated by *the highest courage* and *the purest sense of honour* that ever influenced the actions of any public man."

The purport of this uncertain conversation in the House of Commons, which was rapidly carried over the whole metropolis, was not of a nature to calm the public apprehensions; and as a consequence, the demand for gold at the Bank of England was renewed on the 15th (Tuesday) with increased violence. Towards the afternoon of that day, however, it was confidently said that Earl Grey had been sent for, and was with the King; and in the evening this rumour was confirmed by Earl Grey's moving an adjournment of the peers over Thursday, "in consequence of a communication which he had that day received from his Majesty." This news acted immediately as oil upon the surging waters, and it was just in time. Forty-eight hours more of uncertainty would have caused a run for gold, and a withdrawal of balances from the hands of the bankers, over all the kingdom; and amidst a scene like that, the national system of credit must have been shattered to fragments.

There exist no data which enable the inquirer to ascertain the precise amount of the drain upon Threadneedle Street during the few days of the run upon the bank; but it is known to have been large. That the apprehension of a total wreck of credit decided the question of the administration seems past a doubt; and thus, curiously enough, the question of reform seems really to have been decided by the act of one who was as bitterly its enemy as could be the Duke of Wellington, although his course was more cautious and prudential:

so universally do financial considerations complicate themselves with every act of a government, and so precarious is that financial system which rests upon a basis liable to be shaken or destroyed at the very moment when solidity is most wanted.

The reform-bill was now virtually carried; and in both houses, on the 18th May, long explanations as to their conduct were entered into by the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Alexander Baring, and others implicated more or less in these strange transactions. These explanations are not of a nature, however, to alter the opinion, as to the conduct and motives of the actors, of any inquirer who looks calmly at the circumstances; and as such they were viewed by the public, who, in fact, paid little or no attention to them, being engrossed by the spectacle of the passage of the reform-bill through the House of Peers. This event took place on the 4th of June. The majority of the opposition peers had, at the written request of the King, absented themselves from any further discussion of the measure; and the result was, that the bill passed without alteration in a house of 128 peers, of whom 106 were for it, and 22 against it, no proxies being presented. It received the royal assent on the 7th June by commission, his Majesty not going down to the House in state, as was generally expected, to give his sanction to the measure, which thus became law. That the exaggerations as to the possible consequences of this celebrated act, indulged in by those who opposed, as well as by those who struggled for it, were of the grossest description, no one now denies. By

some they must have been felt to be so at the time of the struggle, and used for party purposes. It is difficult to believe that Sir Robert Peel really thought the reform, as proposed, must be subversive of the monarchy, although he did not scruple during the heat of the parliamentary conflict to use this weapon against his opponents, and to brand them as revolutionists. The anticipations of benignant changes to result from the measure, indulged in by others, were equally Utopian. That such visions helped greatly to stimulate the energies of the people is not to be doubted; but by most of those who uttered them, they could hardly be seriously believed even for a moment. That Sir Robert Peel soon discerned what would be the true nature of the working of the Act, his after-conduct, in no long time, demonstrated; although that its first effect must be to put an apparently resistless power into the hands of his rivals was manifest of course to everybody, himself included.

It is impossible to contemplate the events of the reform-crisis minutely and dispassionately without arriving at the conclusion, that to the good sense, prudence, moderation, and foresight of Sir Robert Peel, the country owed more than it ever was disposed to acknowledge. Of all the opponents of the bill, he alone preserved his equanimity, courtesy, and caution, to the very last. Had he, swayed for once by his passions or political feelings, or, too much entangled by friendly and official ties, consented to join for ever so short a period in the councils of the extreme party opposed to the bill, the consequences must inevitably

have been disastrous. It was a fortunate thing for all that his sagacity had taught him exactly where resistance ought to end, and forbearance to begin; and it is for those who accuse him of want of constancy, or want of energy, to show how opposition could have been carried further without almost certain ruin to that which it was the end of resistance to guard and to preserve.

The remainder of this arduous and memorable session of Parliament was passed principally in the consideration of the separate reform-bills for Scotland and Ireland, which were severally carried through both Houses without material alteration or any serious opposition. On the 16th August, the parliament was prorogued by the King in person, preparatory to a dissolution, which took place, as a matter of course, soon afterwards; thus bringing to a close the last unreformed House of Commons, and leaving a large majority of the people full of hopes, as extravagant as unfounded, as to the beneficent changes which were now to arise out of what was called a new constitution of the representative body.

The business of the general election, under the new Act, was got through during the December of 1832; and its results, when analyzed, must have convinced Sir Robert Peel, as they soon convinced all men capable of calm and cool reflection, that the panic fear which had been entertained, or pretended to be entertained, as to the probability of rash or sweeping democratic changes, was as unfounded as any vision that ever needlessly amused or terrified the imagina-

tions of mankind. A few men certainly, holding what are called extreme opinions, had found entrance into the House of Commons; but even these few were, upon some points, as diametrically opposed to each other as they were to the two great parties known as Tory and Whig.* Hence unity of action, even amongst the members of so small a section, was impossible; and that concurrence of plan which, in 1640, enabled such men as Pym, Hampden, Vane, and others, to raise from small beginnings a power which ultimately ruled the state, was totally wanting to the ultra-reform members of the House of Commons of 1833, who rarely if ever voted in unison upon any question, and who were incapable of that concerted movement which renders a small coterie the *nucleus* sometimes of a large party; and this, under all the circumstances, was the natural result of the change that had been made. They who inveighed against, and they who struggled for, the reform-bill as a democratic measure, forgot that the franchise under it, though it extended greatly, the numbers of the voters at elections, was yet conferred by it upon classes, by nurture and education, less democratically inclined than many of the classes who were already possessed of it. The copyholders and leaseholders in the counties, and the shopkeepers and merchants and merchants' clerks in the boroughs, who were made voters by the reform-act, were just as little

* The three ablest men of ultra-liberal opinions brought by the reform-bill into the House of Commons were, Mr Cobbett, Mr John Arthur Roebuck, and Mr Thomas Attwood; yet few men had more points of opposition, or were less cordial as politicians.

of democrats, either by education, feeling, or circumstances, as were the forty-shilling freeholders or the free burgesses or potwallopers of old. Men, in fact, become the partisans of free institutions in two ways only. They must either be nurtured in the belief of their superiority, or they must derive from education that more refined species of philosophizing which makes men political theorists, and persuades them that it is only by giving to the majority an influence over governments, that they can be made to legislate for the benefit of the many rather than the few. But the nurture of those enfranchised by the Act of 1832 was such as to incline them to be votaries of wealth and power rather than of theory; and, immersed from morning till night in the toil and anxiety of traffic, the occasional newspaper was of necessity their political oracle, and one which was sure to be in the interest of one or other of the two great parties of the state. It needs only a close review of the circumstances, therefore, to show that the results of the general election of 1832 were only such as might have been predicted. The mere fact of being a supporter of the administration, or having voted for the bill, was a sufficient recommendation in almost every instance for a candidate; and the sequel was, that the composition of the first reformed House of Commons was not very different from that of the unreformed House, with the sole exception, that the majority were attached to the party in power rather than to the party which had lost it.

That the acute and practical mind of Sir Robert

Peel must have at once appreciated this fact and its causes, no one will disbelieve. That he did so, indeed, was evidenced in a fact much more singular, which was his having, within two years from that time, undertaken to govern the country (though somewhat prematurely) by means of a House of Commons elected under the very Act against which, whilst its fate was doubtful, he had launched so many clever anathemas. It is not too much to assume, then, that from the day of the meeting of the first reformed parliament, Sir Robert must have anticipated the probable course of events, and seen, in the distant horizon of the future, the fall of his now triumphant rivals and the renewal of his own power and influence. He must of necessity have perceived, immediately, that his opponents had, for the nonce, gained that which by cursory observers would be set down as a power both irresistible and unassailable. But, with his almost intuitive knowledge of political causes and effects, he must have felt that it was neither; although by the party in power, now intoxicated by success, the latent causes of future decadence seemed to be unrecognised or else unheeded. By carrying the reform-bill, the Whig party had indeed obliged many thousands of persons, to whom the possession of a vote was an object to be coveted; but that measure was only secured by means of expectations and promises of the most extravagant nature and relied upon by millions whom Sir Robert knew that his opponents wanted the will, if they had the power, to gratify. He must therefore have anticipated, and no

doubt did anticipate, that a reaction was, in no long time, inevitable, by which he and his party could not choose but profit. He was well aware that hundreds and thousands of persons, who were still deprived of the franchise, believed that one of the earlier acts of a reformed parliament would be to extend it. He knew, too, the general belief entertained, that immediate measures for bettering the condition of the people and diminishing the crushing pressure of taxation, were in contemplation. And whilst he knew this, he was quite sure that the Whig party—who, indeed, took now no pains to conceal their intentions—fully intended the reform-act to be a final measure; and, surrounded by hungry clients, had neither the power nor the wish to take the slightest effectual step for the relief of the pressure upon the country. Besides all this, he clearly perceived, as did all clear-sighted persons, that the party in power were impressed with the idea that they had succeeded in resting that power upon a foundation that could not fail them under any storm of unpopularity, and were therefore in the mood to carry out schemes upon which, under ordinary circumstances, they would never have ventured.

That Sir Robert, with his usual cunning, calculated upon reaping the profits of some of these projects, whilst his rivals reaped the unpopularity, is but too likely. At all events he was well aware how fallacious was the notion that the reform-act had placed the parliamentary liberals and their immediate adherents in a position which would not be easily carried, should they again lose the support of popular

and general opinion in their favour. No man knew better the strength and the weakness of the great Tory party than did Sir Robert Peel. He was perfectly well aware that with them lay the preponderance of wealth, and of the influence and power which wealth, especially in England, confers upon its possessors. He calculated that, unless in a time of great popular excitement, their hold upon the county representation was not materially diminished, and that in many of the smaller and more rural towns it would be gradually regained. Preston had already given proof of this by returning Mr Stanley under the Derby influence, in company with an aristocratic colleague, to the utter disappointment of the radical party there, who elected Mr Hunt two years before. Hence there remains little doubt that, even at the moment of the apparent triumph of his rivals, Sir Robert Peel saw, in the vista of futurity, all the chances of a return to power. It did not need any deep knowledge of the talents and designs of his opponents to assure him that their springtide of popularity would quickly become an ebb; and he could safely trust to his own political tact and adroitness to enable him to take immediate advantage of a party who were prepared to treat the people much as the Barmecide treated his guests; who never came into power but by the aid of promises which they did not mean to keep, and who have invariably lost it by breaking pledges which they ought never to have made.

CHAPTER IV.

First reformed Parliament—Spread of Joint-stock Banks—Coercion Bill for Ireland—Sir Robert Peel supports it—Strongly opposed by the Radical Party—Sir Robert's Address—Terrible Anecdote—His Defence of the Clergy and Blame of the Landlords—Mr Thomas Attwood moves an Inquiry into the State of the Country—Mr Matthias Attwood renews the Attempt—Mr Cobbett's Motion against Sir Robert—Bank of England Notes made a legal Tender—Sir Robert Peel vainly resists—Negro Slavery abolished—Sir Robert's Advice—Poor-law Amendment Act—Cautious Conduct of Sir Robert Peel—Probable Motives—Strong Reaction created by this Act—Division in the Cabinet—Earl Grey retires—First Melbourne Cabinet—Prorogation of Parliament—Earl Spencer dies—The King dismisses his Ministers—Sir Robert Peel forms a Ministry—Dissolves Parliament—Is in a Minority—Appropriation Resolutions—The Peel Ministry resigns—Improved Position of Sir Robert Peel.

On the evening of the 29th of January 1833, Sir Robert Peel might be seen, calmly, and with his usual courtesy of demeanour, occupying his seat on the Opposition benches, to which, as his enemies foolishly hoped, the reform-act had fixed him for the remainder, long or short, of his parliamentary life, and where he was at that period not able to recognise more than about one hundred followers. As he now

ceased, for a period, to be directly implicated in the movements of cabinets, it is only necessary to indicate to the reader the line of conduct chosen by him, with regard to such important questions as were discussed, during the strange period that intervenes between 1832 and the time of his being recalled by the public voice to the government of his country. The Whig cabinet lost no time in letting it be seen that such measures as they meant to propose would not be of the nature of those expected by the more credulous portion of the community. In thus evading the expectations which had been so liberally encouraged during the heat of the reform-conflict, they were, in some measure, aided by a temporary amelioration which now began to be felt in the commercial affairs of the country, the main cause of which was this.

During the short administration of Lord Goderich, and in the midst of the discredit which the monetary catastrophe of 1825-6 threw upon the system of country-banking, that minister had procured to be passed an act giving permission for the erection of banks upon a joint-stock system, without limitation to the number of shareholder partners. During the agitation of the Emancipation-bill and of the Reform-bill, which soon followed, this act had been suffered to sleep without being much noticed by speculators. In 1833, however, the political atmosphere being comparatively tranquil, the spirit of speculation again began to walk abroad. He quickly laid hold of this act of Lord Goderich, as at all events fit for his purpose, if for no other; and a *mania* for joint-stock

banks arose, especially in the cotton and woollen manufacturing districts, where banking accommodation was eagerly sought. It was not easy to resolve the question *why* these unwieldy institutions should be conducted more prudently than were the former establishments to which they now became rivals; or *why* directors, with only a very limited stake in a concern, should be more cautious in its management than a banker whose whole means were at hazard? Without much examination of the legal liabilities under which they thus placed themselves, however, thousands of persons of all grades, from the monied speculator to the needy adventurer, eagerly rushed to take shares in these adventures. Joint-stock banks sprang up like mushrooms of a gigantic size in every quarter of the country; and being, in reality, much more recklessly managed than were the old country banks of six partners, and their credit, at first, being almost unbounded, commercial affairs soon felt the effects of issues dealt forth on a scale so liberal; an artificial impetus was given to trade, and especially the export trade to America; and, as was the case in 1823-4, after the Small-note-respite Act, men in general began to fancy that another "halcyon summer" of prosperity was coming upon the land, and much of the complaints from the manufacturing districts which ushered in the reform-bill, became, for the time, silent. This fictitious prosperity could not and did not endure; but for a period of three years it unquestionably smoothed the path of ministers, who were not without need of such aid.

The first question of importance which came before the reformed House of Commons was that everlasting problem, always to be argued—never to be solved;—what is to be done with miserable Ireland? To attempt to trace, in detail, the terrible complication of long-existing causes which have made the state of society in Ireland a disgrace, not only to the rulers of the country, but to civilisation itself, would be foreign to the immediate purpose of these pages. Suffice it to say, that so multiform, so deeply seated, and so complicated are the evils which, for centuries, have worse than crucified the unhappy Irish Celt, that it is to be doubted whether any possible British government can ever have the power necessary for their removal. To expect that the repeal of the penal laws affecting Catholics could in the least degree mitigate them, was more than absurd. It was to raise expectations which were sure to be disappointed, and to create a reaction, cruel because unfounded. From the first moment of the ministerial proposal to repeal the remaining penal laws, Sir Robert Peel was warned by the few persons who, at that period, were inclined to speak truths so unpalatable, that though penal laws, on account of religion, were worse than useless and ought never to be countenanced, it was yet in vain to expect that the proposed repeal could cure the deeply seated social diseases by which Ireland is scourged.

This prediction was immediately verified. The latent but potential causes which deprave and poison the social state of the unhappy island were still at work,

brutifying and exasperating, at once, the miserable millions subjected to them; and, in 1833, Ireland was one scene of lawlessness and bloodshed, the province of Leinster, however, being most prolific of heinous crime and outrage. With this state of affairs the ministers were now to deal, and they proposed to do so after the ancient method; that is, by subjecting Ireland to martial law, and palliating the effect of this terrible measure by some redistribution of the property of the Church, under the name of reform.

By this measure the ire of the ultra-liberal, or radical, party in and out of the House, was stirred exceedingly. They held that it was worse than childish to expect to conciliate, by means of a mere redistribution of church-property, a catholic priesthood and laity, to whom that church must ever appear as a sacrilegious and schismatical usurpation. That to put Ireland on a footing with Scotland, where the national faith was established, the Irish establishment should be Catholic. That, if this were resisted, then the Church in Ireland ought to be repealed, and its property converted to educational purposes, and thus the two religions put on a level. And to this measure, some insisted, ought to be added a poor-law for Ireland, and a tax upon absentees, which should compel them either to become Irish residents, or to sell their lands to men who would make Ireland their country. From these last proposals the Economists of that day dissented; and the ministers, who, unluckily for them, included in their body some Economists (so called), viewed such propositions not only with dislike but derision. They

were, in fact, at that moment plotting the destruction of the English poor-law—an attempt which will enable any sound head to estimate what the political economy of 1833 was worth, and which hastened, by some years, their own destruction.

The Bill for the Suppression of Disturbances in Ireland was brought into the House of Commons by Lord Althorp on the 27th of February; and on the 1st of March, the debate having been adjourned, Sir Robert Peel addressed the House in support of it. This speech, which deals less in special pleading and more in the oratorical than was usual with the speaker, and which is admirably adapted to a miscellaneous audience, is probably one of the most effective addresses he ever uttered. It is so because, having no end to gain by means of an astute logic, and having to address a somewhat adverse audience, he endeavours to interest, and when he does so, succeeds. In this very powerful harangue, to which the consciousness that his opponents were now forced to do that which they had so often vituperated when done by him no doubt gave spirit, he sets out by a view of the evidence of the terrible disorganization of Ireland, which he asserts is proved. He then puts the measure upon the ground of necessity—of a dreadful necessity—before which ordinary maxims give way, and to meet which precedents or forms are futile and valueless. He then breaks out into the following powerful appeal in reply to those who urged against the measure the forms and safeguards of the "constitution:"—

"It is said this measure amounts to a suspension of the British Constitution. I admit that it is a measure of severity —of intolerable severity—unless there be a paramount necessity for it. I admit that (hear, hear, hear!); but I deny that it is *a suspension of the British Constitution.* Oh, no! that has been long suspended. I see, indeed, a ghastly form, which takes the semblance and usurps the name of the British Constitution, but it is a phantom without life. You mistake the British Constitution. It is not a mere heap of cumbrous formalities that serve no other purpose but to give impunity to those who are accused of crime. The British Constitution is meant to give equal protection, and to ensure to all equal liberty. It pre-supposes the existence of some executory principle to work it—of instruments imbued with the generous spirit in which itself was framed. It pre-supposes a love of order—a respect for property—a reverence for the obligation of an oath. The British Constitution never recognised the vile doctrine of passive resistance. It may have no punishment for it. It may have been too generous to foresee a wide-spread combination among rich and poor to defeat the law, and rob others of their property; but as long as this robbery is done with impunity—as long as innocent men are fleeing from their homes to seek protection from murder, do what you will, but do not talk of 'the British Constitution!' Spare us stale quotations from Chatham—spare us the empty boast, that 'an Englishman's house is his castle!' What! Was the Rev. Mr Houston's house '*his* castle?' Was Mr Maram's house '*his* castle?' Will you see men savagely murdered in the broad daylight by assassins, and then mock their widows, and mock their children, with your laboured periods about 'British Constitution' and 'an Englishman's castle?' You may not be able to punish the guilt—you may not be able to prevent murder—but do not let such deeds be perpetrated under the name and cover of 'the British Constitution!'"

Sir Robert had the manly justice, however, to demonstrate to the House that the violators of law and equity, in unhappy Ireland, were not all of one sort, nor ranged on one side. He first quoted the evidence of a Mr O'Dwyer to the following effect:—"I have, in my own instance (said Mr O'Dwyer), known the tithe-composition applotment to be borrowed from me and from my clerk, by the agents of proprietors in the country, for the purpose of ascertaining what the exact amount of composition was with reference to their own estates, and then setting their lands. On many occasions I believe it has been the practice to embody in the rent, that they charge upon the tenant the amount of the composition-rent as applotted or assessed upon the land, but still, nevertheless, that the liability for payment remained upon the tenants; and those tenants have, many of them, complained to me, that when they offered their receipts for 'tithe rent' *they got no credit for it in the accounts of their landlords!*" Would not the tenant (it was asked) have the power to enforce such a claim as this against a landlord? What is the answer? "I am not aware that there is any especial provision in the Act itself that would enable this; but I am sufficiently well acquainted with the dispositions and the habits of the people, to know that *it would not be a very feasible thing for them to do, to compel such credit to be given!* The tenantry, in fact, are for the most part too much dependent on their landlords for *this. Leases are not generally given complete leases.* They more frequently hold by demise, or they hold by acceptance of a pro-

posal, which leaves them entirely at the mercy of the landlord to continue them or not!" "Now, I ask (said Sir Robert Peel), is the statement of this clergyman, the Rev. Mr O'Dwyer, true or not? Are there, in some parts of Ireland, landlords who have done this? Have they increased the rent of their tenants by the amount of tithe to which those tenants were liable—left the tenant responsible to the clergyman—and then, at last, refused to give him credit for the amount paid, notwithstanding his production of the clergyman's receipt? If these things are not true, contradict them; but whilst they remain on our records and not contradicted, it is neither generous nor just, in this assembly of landlords (hear, hear, hear!), to hold the clergy up as extortioners, robbers, and destroyers of the poor!"

In expatiating upon the dreadfully disorganized and demoralized state of Ireland, Sir Robert thrilled his hearers with a tale of terror, the extraordinary circumstances of which, had they been less authoritatively vouched for, would hardly have found credit.

"There was a family (related Sir Robert) in the county of Kilkenny, consisting of a father, mother, and three children, the eldest child a girl of about nine years of age. The father had made himself obnoxious by giving evidence against some persons charged with Whiteboy offences, who were, I believe, tried and executed.* He was forced to leave the country. He

* Mr O'Connell's allusion to this terrible case gives a strange idea of the course of criminal justice in Ireland:—"I defended these prisoners. The husband, Delain, gave a very good and consistent account of what he wished the jury to believe to have been

came to Dublin, but the desire to return to his native spot overcame his fears, and he was resolved to brave the danger. It was in vain to expostulate with him. All he asked was to be allowed to return home, and that his house might be *slated*. Perhaps some English members are not aware of the object of this request, and do not see the great difference, in point of security, between a thatched and a slated house. Here again is one of the slight, almost imperceptible circumstances that are unerring indications of the state of society. The house is slated as a means of additional defence, to prevent the murderers, who may try to force an entrance through door or window, from setting fire to the roof in case of failure. The man returned to his house—took possession of his house—received a notice to leave it—with a threat of murder if he did not. But he still resisted all importunity to him to seek a place of safety, and remained with his family for some weeks without being attacked, long enough to relax his vigilance. One night, however, his house was surrounded either by eleven or nine men, I forget which at this moment. He was asleep in

the nature of the transaction in question. But his wife, being subjected to a cross-examination, and not having heard her husband's testimony, betrayed the whole plan, although she agreed perfectly with the husband's evidence on all those points which they had settled between them.' Baron George said:—"Mr O'Connell, here's a capital indictment! You need not take up the time of the court with it, for no jury could convict in such a case.' What was my astonishment when I was informed that the prisoners had, notwithstanding this, been condemned. The Whiteboy Act gives the power of trying an offence of this nature either as a misdemeanour or a transportable felony. The same facts had been laid as a misdemeanour, and the four prisoners suffered the full severity upon this conviction. Delain and his wife returned to the country. They were assassinated.'—*Hansard*, vol. xvi. p. 253.—Whatever other effect this statement may have, it does not lessen the extraordinary nature of the tale.

bed with his wife and children. They broke into the house—dragged the man just outside the door, and murdered him in the most shocking manner with pitchforks, almost in sight of his wife and his children. Now, let the House mark what I am about to relate. Whilst the husband was in the struggle of death, the mother took her child—the child of nine years of age—placed it in a recess that was close to the fireplace—and such was the fortitude of that woman—such her awful composure, whilst the cries of her dying husband were ringing in her ears, that she said to her child, 'Those are the cries of your dying father. I shall be the next victim. After they have murdered him, they will murder me. I will struggle with them to the last, that I may give you time to do that for which I put you here. My last act will be, to throw this dry turf upon the hearth, and do you, by the glare of it, watch the faces of the murderers. Mark them all narrowly, that you may be able to tell who they are, and revenge the deaths of your father and your mother!'

"As the unhappy woman foretold, so it fell out. She, too, was summoned, but she would not go forth. After a short but unsuccessful struggle with her murderers, she was dragged out of the house; and she was actually slain upon the bleeding body of her husband. But the child obeyed her dying command;—watched by the lighted turf the faces and every motion of the assassins; and upon the artless evidence of that child, which nothing could shake, five of those assassins were convicted and hanged.* Such are the romances of real life."

*Mr O'Connell's comment on the conclusion was as follows:—"Eight men were executed for that crime. But one innocent man was executed, who was proved, afterwards, to have had no other connexion with the murder than that he had walked a short distance with the murderers before the commission of the deed. He had served in the navy, and was returning home."—*Hansard, 3d series*, vol. xvi. p. 254.

The bill passed the Commons by a majority of 259; those for it being 345; those against it 86. Some of the most stringent clauses were, however, amended in committee; so strong out of doors was the feeling against it, and especially that part which erected courts-martial into criminal tribunals. On that part of Sir Robert's address which related to a poor-law for Ireland, it is not necessary nor is it pleasant to dwell. It was ominous of that which was to come; and of the unfortunate part which, in opposition to some of the most experienced heads of his party, he was prepared to take.

The coercion-bill for Ireland was not, however, the only difficulty with which the ministry of 1833 had to deal. It has been already made apparent that the struggle for the reform-bill was, in a great measure, brought to a successful conclusion by the unwearied efforts of a class of thinkers who not only saw the reality of the evils that were, cancer-like, slowly eating into the bosom of the country, but who understood the causes of this slow but ceaseless decadence which no industry could cure, and which the most fortunate concurrence of events could only avail to palliate or mitigate for a time. The gigantic blunder of the act of 1819 had all along been detected and proclaimed by these men. In despair of obtaining justice from a parliament elected under the close-borough system, the Birmingham Political Union, the parent of all the rest, was formed, for the purpose not only of obtaining reform, but of obtaining, through its means, a parliament which would not shrink from dealing with the mischiefs and slow devastation of

the rash Act of 1819, and awarding that justice which former parliaments not only evaded but ignored. At the general election, under the reform-act, were returned for Birmingham Mr Thomas Attwood, the originator and chairman of the Birmingham Union, and Mr Joshua Scholefield, an active member of the same powerful combination; two men of great influence and high character, and of talents only inferior to that high character. It was not to be supposed that such men would sit for any length of time in the House of Commons without demanding that justice for which they had striven to re-constitute that House. Accordingly, on the 21st of March, Lord Althorp having moved that the House should resolve itself into a committee on the Irish Disturbances Bill, Mr Thomas Attwood opposed the motion in a speech of great power and ability, and insisted that the consideration of the distress of the country should have priority. Mr Attwood concluded by moving for the appointment of a select committee "to inquire into the causes of the general distress amongst the industrious classes." To an ordinary observer this motion of the honourable member for Birmingham would seem to be altogether a matter of course. Everybody knew that the real cause of the struggle for reform was the pressure on the productive classes, and the desire of the nation to have a legislature that should inquire into the causes of that distress, and adopt a remedy for it. An ordinary observer would, therefore, have looked to see Mr Attwood's motion carried by acclamation; for to such an observer the notion that an

elective legislature should refuse to inquire into the distress of the people whom they professed to represent, would have appeared something monstrous. To those, however, to whom the composition of the House of Commons was known, the result of Mr Attwood's attempt seemed only natural. The truth was, that the majority of that House was composed of persons who, in some way or other, were committed to the Act of 1819, or who deemed an adherence to it essential to their interests. That majority saw at once that if the proposal of a committee of inquiry were assented to, it would be impossible to exclude from that committee the members for Birmingham and Whitehaven, and perhaps the members for Oldham; men who were thoroughly conversant with the question, and who would take care to bring before the committee evidence which would demonstrate to the eyes of the whole world the enormous blunders of Horner and Ricardo, and the gigantic injustice of that Act, of which Sir Robert Peel was the ostensible author. Thus it was immediately manifest that not only Sir Robert Peel and the Economists, who persuaded him to become the putative father of the Act of 1819, must be opposed to the erection of such a committee, but that it must also be distasteful to every one who had at any time assented to that Act. In this position were members sitting on both sides of the House, including many of the county members, who had been induced by Mr Western (now Lord Western), to allow the cash-payments measure to pass, under the belief that the corn-bill would shield the landed interest from its

destructive effects, giving them, at the same time, a high scale of rental. The result was as might have been anticipated from the position of parties. After a debate, in the course of which Mr Matthias Attwood vainly endeavoured to prevail upon his relative to withdraw the motion, upon the consideration that the House was not then prepared to go into a matter so momentous, it was lost by thirty-four; the ayes being 158; the noes 192;—Sir Robert Peel voting with the majority without taking any part in the discussion.

Although this result distinctly indicated the future fate of any further attempts to induce the House of Commons to reconsider the Act of 1819, the opponents of that measure were not discouraged. On the 22d of April Mr Matthias Attwood, member for Whitehaven, again moved for a committee to take into consideration the difficulties and embarrassments now pressing upon the productive classes of society. This was met by the Chancellor of the Exchequer by an amendment declaring that any alteration in the monetary system which should have the effect of lowering the standard was inexpedient. After three nights of debate, on one of which Sir Robert Peel spoke at great length and with much art against the motion, Lord Althorp's emendatory resolution was carried by a very large majority; the ayes being 304, the noes 49; majority 255; and, on another division, a proposal by Mr Attwood to appoint a committee, with Lord Althorp's resolution added as an instruction to that committee, was negatived by 137. The objections urged by Sir Robert Peel against Mr Attwood's

proposition were, that the appointment of such a committee would produce panic and confusion. That everybody would deem a fresh depreciation of the current money was intended; that buying and selling, except for cash, would be suspended; and that every creditor would press his debtor for instant payment. Had the House even been inclined to have admitted the injustice perpetrated in 1819, and to have sought for a remedy, it must be candidly allowed that the difficulties in the way of any remedial course were very great, and that fractional justice could not have been done. Minor and individual interests ought not, however, to stand in the way of the national interests; and however great the remedial difficulties, the injustice yearly perpetrating by the Act of 1819 is infinitely greater. The majority of the House were, however, bound either by party-ties or motives of direct interest to Peel's Act; and to have consented to a committee would only have made them accessory to a full and complete exposure of the enormity which they advocated, and to themselves being convicted either of gross ignorance or gross partiality.* In this

* It is not easy to believe that the bill of 1819 was brought in and passed in utter ignorance of its real consequences. The Portuguese government has never been deemed a *very* enlightened one, and yet a measure of the same kind was, about this time, adopted by it, and carried through, on equitable principles, and without material difficulty. The minister found it prudent, by withdrawing a portion of paper-money, to enhance the value of the currency of Portugal *twenty per cent.* He did so; but at the same time, knowing what he did, he made a commensurate reduction upon all debts, public and private, so as to adjust the payments to the higher standard; and

is to be found the real motive of the decided negative given by the reformed House of Commons to all attempts to inquire into the causes of national pressure. The whole subject is, to this day, a riddle and a mystery to the public; and nothing short of an elaborate inquiry by a committee of the legislature could possibly induce that public to believe in the injuries inflicted by that rash and unadvised piece of legislation. That Sir Robert Peel, and every member who was party to the bill, should struggle to stifle such an exposure, was only natural. To admit having done injustice is always a hard trial; but, when the injury is all but irremediable, the trial becomes infinitely more severe. That Mr Cobbett's proposal to exclude Sir Robert Peel, as the author of the act of 1819, from the privy-council, should meet with a reception much worse than that of Mr Attwood's motion, was nothing surprising. Mr Cobbett's Bill of Indictment as against the Act of 1819 was just; but it was palpably unfair to visit upon the individual the consequences of a deed which was that of the whole legislature, and which was unanimously agreed to or acquiesced in by those present, of every party. If anything were wanting to demonstrate the true motive for the resistance made to Mr Attwood's motion, we have it in the curious fact that, after all this affected fear of making

the fairness of this was so manifest, and prices so rapidly adjusted themselves under the enhanced currency, that few murmured under the measure, and no one was appreciably injured by it. The Portuguese, luckily for themselves, had no Ricardo in power, or it might have been otherwise.

the slightest change in the Currency Act of 1819 which was exhibited in the month of April, the same ministers, in the ensuing month of May, actually proposed and carried a change which not only repealed one of its most essential provisions, but made a change in the law of England which Mr Pitt, in the height of his power, carefully avoided to make, although strongly urged by events to take the same step. When compelled, by the disappearance of the specie in circulation, to resort, in 1797, to the step of bank-restriction, Mr Pitt yet shrank from the innovation of making bank-notes "a legal tender" in discharge of a debt between individuals. The tender of the notes of the Bank of England was a bar to arrest; but any man who disliked the security might still, by law, recover the king's coin in payment of a legal debt of any kind.

Upon this right the ministry, in the supposed plenitude of their sway, now resolved to innovate. The run for specie, which, in 1832, saved the ministry and secured the reform-bill, yet made a deep and profound impression upon thinking men, and especially upon those responsible for the national welfare. It was then made manifest that the entire credit-system rested upon a few millions of gold and silver, lodged in the hands of the bank but liable to be withdrawn in case of alarm from whatever cause arising. Anything that terrified the depositors in savings or other banks, together with the holders of bank-notes, might do this in a month's time. A war, a domestic disturbance, a famine and large import of grain, might pro-

duce this effect. To mitigate, if possible, this danger, the Chancellor of the Exchequer cast about for expedients; and as a renewal of the charter of the Bank of England was then under consideration, he proposed to insert a clause in the Act for that purpose, making the notes of the governor and company a legal tender, except from the bank itself, for all sums above £5. This measure, which was a flagrant violation of the Act of 1819, was steadily, though unsuccessfully opposed by Sir Robert Peel. It does not appear from the right honourable gentleman's remarks that he did so from the fear of a consequence, the hope of which caused many to vote for it; that is to say, of a fresh depreciation of the currency. This Sir Robert probably perceived could not be effected without the aid of notes for £1, although the encouragement thus given to push paper out might, as it did, foster extravagant speculations in particular lines. His remarks were as follows:—

"Everything which tended to confidence was good. That he admitted. But was it possible to give confidence by Act of Parliament? His honourable friend had alluded to the confidence placed in bankers' cheques upon the Bank of England. True. But whence did that confidence arise? Because there was *no* interference of an Act of Parliament. As Mr Burke stated it, commercial confidence gave bankers' cheques currency on the Exchange, because they had none in Westminster Hall. All depended on commercial confidence; and if his honourable friend could pass a law to *force* people to place confidence in cheques, the result would be exactly opposed to his wishes! His honourable friend also referred to the want of confidence which the risk of war or internal convulsion might produce;

but he would ask, *where* was such panic likely to arise? Not in remote country towns, but in London. * * * *

He did not see why any interference with country bankers ought to take place. He would say, let the country bankers still issue their notes convertible into metallic currency, and let them provide what security they deemed best for deposits put into their hands, but give them a right to claim a notice for the withdrawal of deposits. This would be far better than any option for paying in bank-paper. Besides, how open was this plan to evasion! There was no bank-note under £5. Depositors would only have to draw as many cheques as they pleased for £4, 19s., and thus compel a payment in metallic money. * * * * * * *

The object in view was to provide against the effects of panic, whether general or partial; and when such existed, nothing could prevent depositors from resorting to every possible expedient to obtain payment in the only currency in which they retained confidence. The noble lord (Althorp) and the right honourable gentleman (Poulett Thomson) seemed to have discarded from consideration the various means of evasion to which their plans were open. The noble lord came to the House to-night, and, to his (Sir R. Peel's) unutterable surprise, proposed that a £5 note should be convertible into gold on demand. This was a most important change; and its effect might be this, to give a direct legislative premium upon keeping notes for £5 out of the market and out of circulation (hear, hear, hear!) * * * The whole scope of this measure was to induce country bankers not to keep gold in their coffers, but to rely on the Bank of England for a supply of notes when needed; and hence, if panic were to arise, these bankers would run up to town and carry back, not gold, but Bank of England notes. What, however, would become of them, or what would they say or do, when they found the holders of Bank of England £5 notes pressing them for gold, which they would most assuredly do? The noble lord indeed said, that nobody was to

take two £5 notes together and claim gold for the two, because that would be demanding gold for *ten* pounds; but what would the noble lord say if a holder of such notes were to come and present one for payment every half-hour, or employ his servants in getting gold for them separately?"

Sir Robert very properly observed, in conclusion:

"The noble lord now, on the 1st July, without waiting for the reports of two committees which he himself appointed, comes forward with one of the most startling propositions ever heard, founded on the most slender stock of argument possible. He was told that it was 'all to prevent panics;' but he must reply, 'Acts of Parliament cannot prevent panics.' The noble lord might depend upon it, the people would never put confidence in bank-paper merely because an Act of Parliament told them to do so. The noble lord might rest assured that confidence in paper-money cannot be obtained by compulsory enactment."

The resolution for enacting the legal tender as proposed was carried by a majority of 58: the ayes being 214, the noes 156. A very few years sufficiently proved how nugatory such arrangements are to give safety to a currency four-fifths paper, yet payable in gold, when panic sets in, and the parent bank is seen to be endangered. It is difficult, however, severely to blame Earl Grey's government for the step then taken. The facility with which the whole political system might be checkmated by an action on the savings banks had been alluded to openly, in the transactions of some of the political unions; and, in their existing state of organization, this was not a symptom to be disregarded.

The other great measure of the session was the abolition of negro slavery in the colonies: a measure

which never received the full and calm consideration which ought to have been bestowed upon it, because the ministers were chained to it, and tied by former pledges, as it were, "to the stake." The abolition of negro slavery had long been a part of the stock in trade of the Whig party; and even Mr Pitt, powerful as he was, condescended to make use of it in order to secure the co-operation of Wilberforce and his friends, whom he thus conciliated to the support of some of his most questionable measures. The question was one beset with difficulties on all sides. To defend slavery in the abstract was impossible. As applied to the negroes in the sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations, the system is so unmasked and so revolting to the better feelings of all not rendered callous by custom, that even men who are friendly to more mitigated systems of arbitrary rule, and who, like Horsley, hold that "a people has nothing to do with the laws but to obey them," are utterly disgusted by slavery in this its rough shape; so that even Dr Johnson used to drink, in his younger days, "Success to the next insurrection of negroes in the West Indies!" Thus, therefore, the abolitionists had some of the strongest feelings of our nature as well as abstract right on their side—a mighty power with which to work. On the other hand, it must be admitted, that many persons were alienated from the cause of the emancipation of the blacks by the trading philanthropists, which it created in great numbers, and persons in quest of a reputation for humanity which cost them nothing. The persons seriously to be affected by the measure were across the

Atlantic, and it was easy to be humane and Christian-like at their expense. To reason with this sort of people was useless, because their professions were really hollow, and their motives really selfish; and, by the transparent cant of this class, many right-minded reasoners were rendered averse. Upon the whole, however, the abolitionists were both a powerful and an active party; and the Whigs, in their more disastrous times, rashly bought the support of this party by pledging themselves to their schemes. This pledge was now to be redeemed, and reflecting men soon began to perceive how rash it had been. Had Great Britain been the only realm compromised, the only slave-holding nation, escape would have been easier. Had the coffee, cotton, sugar, and rum, consumed by the British people, been the only articles of this description grown by the negro slaves, all that could be required was the will to give up this cheaper method of production, to pay the augmented prices that might thus be caused in all the markets of colonial produce, and to submit to the levy of the sum necessary to compensate the planter for the sacrifice he was to make. But under existing circumstances, the question was much more complicated. The coffee, rum, and sugar of the West Indies did not constitute the only slave-grown produce consumed in England, nor half of it. The necessities of British manufacturing industry had, in fact, raised up a huge system of slavery in the southern United States of America. Without cotton, the spinning-jenny of Arkwright, the mule of Crompton, the power-looms of Cartwright and Har-

greaves, and even the steam-engine of Watt, became, comparatively speaking, useless toys; and to the cotton manufacture of England the slave-system of Virginia, the Carolinas, and the states bordering on the Mississippi, was from the first betrothed and married. From the very first, therefore, it was evident to all men, that to refuse to work up cotton the produce of slavery was, under the circumstances, utterly impossible. All this was the growth of a few years. It is quite certain that the manumission of the few negroes then in bondage in the American colonies formed part of the first draught of the American constitution, as drawn in the rough by Jefferson, Paine, and Franklin, and that they were prevailed on to strike it out only from the belief that negro slavery was dying out spontaneously! This was between 1775 and 1783. In 1783, British mechanical genius reversed the whole; and the growth of the cotton-plant resuscitated slavery in America!

Thus, compelled to be buyers of American cotton, and with a possibility that perhaps even the sugars of Cuba and Brazil might not, in case of the ruin of Jamaica, be ultimately kept out, men asked themselves the obvious question whether it would not be both the wiser and more humane course to use every energy to cause a general amelioration of the system, until the nations could be induced to unite in gradually dispensing with slave-labour by substituting the aid of the more educated free negro? In parliament, however, the question was virtually carried as soon as the reform-act seated the ministers in permanent power. At the general election of 1831,

almost every liberal candidate was pledged to the extinction of black slavery as well as to that of the boroughs of Schedule A; and from these promises no retreat was now possible. Sir Robert Peel's conduct showed, clearly enough, that he saw this; and not concealing that such was his view, he gave no real opposition to Mr Stanley's resolutions, which pledged the House to emancipation of the negro. All he attempted was to moderate the fanaticism of those who were for immediate unconditional emancipation, and who, making it a theological rather than a political question, were not to be argued with upon the level ground of ordinary policy. Sir Robert said,—

"He assumed that he was addressing a House of Commons prepared to run the hazard of every sacrifice to ensure the emancipation of the negroes; but (he added) he was still confident that in the decision to which the committee was about to come, honourable members would not merely look to the redemption of any hasty and inconsiderate pledges which they might have given to their constituents upon the hustings. He felt confident they would not look to the achievement of any triumph over the West Indian assemblies. Their object would, he was sure, not be to punish colonial legislators, but to lay the foundations of future prosperity and tranquillity in those countries in which they formed a constituent and important part. Their object would not be to pass some hasty votes recognising the expediency and justice of negro manumission; but to alter—safely and prudently—the state of society in a hemisphere different from that in which they themselves lived;—to amalgamate two distinct and separate races; and supply a better stimulus to negro labour than the old degrading and base stimulus of the whip. * * * Was that not the object of parliament? If it were—then he

was bound to proceed to say that this question was encompassed with greater difficulties than either the majority of petitioners, ay or the majority of the House itself, were prepared to anticipate. (Cheers from both sides.) He was not about to state these difficulties for the purpose of proposing any indefinite delay; for it was now in such a state that some step in this question *must* be taken."

Sir Robert thus continued his statement, arguing from difficulty to the absolute necessity for caution and distrust.

"There are physical as well as moral causes which obstruct the settlement of the question, and make it one of great and just embarrassment. There was the distinction of colour. He did not (he said) allude to that as implying any inferiority between the black and white man;—he merely alluded to it as a circumstance that threw a difficulty in the way of amalgamating the slave-population with the free, which did not exist either in any country in Europe, or in any country of the East where slavery had been extinguished. If honourable gentlemen would look at the United States, or to any other of the democratic states which recognise nominally the equality of all classes, they would find that very long after slavery was nominally abolished, the amalgamation between the slave and free population, which all admitted to be desirable, did not take place in any full or any satisfactory manner. This was undoubted. In the West Indies, the climate, the aversion to work, and the ease of obtaining subsistence, were perpetual obstacles to success. In other countries, the stimulus to work arose from the necessity of subsisting. In the West Indies, after abolishing coercion, you cannot substitute the necessity of procuring subsistence. The labour of a few days, there, is all that is necessary to procure, not only the means to live, but the luxuries of life."

Sir Robert concluded a long and calmly argumentative speech in the following words,—

"He implored the House, after recognising the principle of the first resolution, to apply it with discretion, and to take care they did not by their legislation increase the hardships of slaves in the Brazils and Spanish colonies, instead of obtaining any mitigation of their lot. Let them not lay themselves open to the bitter taunt—'Had you tried your experiment with more caution, *we* might have been free!' If they proceeded cautiously, they might—probably—have the satisfaction—the highest which a Christian legislature—which human being could enjoy—of setting an example of such a wisely regulated humanity that it was worthy of being followed by all the world. But, if they refused, after establishing the principle of liberty, to accommodate it to the state of society in our colonies;—if they proved that this emancipation was *not* accompanied with increased security to property and to life; if they induced the United States, with two millions of slaves, to persist in refusing them religious education and all knowledge, from fear of the use they might make of it,—they would only sacrifice the interests of England; and would incur,—he would not say the guilt,—but the deep responsibility of having, by a precipitate attempt to ameliorate the condition of our own slaves, aggravated the hardships of those who were exposed to a more bitter fate in many other parts of the world."

It was in the midst of volumes of such moral and Christian-like eloquence, in which Sir Robert Peel bore his due share, that the extinction of slavery in the British colonies was carried by immense majorities. Whether the measure, then matured, has diminished or increased the crimes and cruelties of negro slavery in the aggregate, is a question which future annalists

will answer. Our satisfaction, however, in the wondrously philanthropic result of 1833 is somewhat damped by the reflection that a majority of those who now, with unctuous lips and watery eyes, were chanting homilies on the cruelties inflicted upon blacks, meditated, at that very moment, to be dealt out to such of their unfortunate countrymen and countrywomen as might be driven by distress, arising perhaps from acts of their own government, to apply for relief,—a measure which future historians will fail in truly characterizing, from a fear of being induced to overstep that calmness of language which custom has prescribed to the labourer in that department of literature.

On the 17th of April 1834, Lord Althorp, the Chancellor of Exchequer, moved for leave to bring in a bill to "Amend the Poor-laws;" but, before touching upon the provisions of this bill, it is necessary to advert to some of the preliminary circumstances from which it took its rise. It is probably the best course to say at once, that this attempt sprung from the false and pernicious *dogmata* respecting population and its progress, which had then, unhappily, been in vogue for a great many years. Up to about the time of the disastrous American colonial conflict, no one, either in Great Britain or elsewhere, troubled himself as to the progress of population, excepting that most governments, whether civilized or only partially so, wishing to sustain their numerical strength, as a means avowedly encouraged marriage. Towards the latter end of the eighteenth century, however, specu-

lations as to population and its progress began to be commenced by men of inquiring minds, and a change of opinions as to this matter imperceptibly arose. In England, for some years anterior to the Reformation, a considerable diminution of people had become visible; and the statute-book abounds in enactments with a view to cure some of the consequences of this alarming decrease which took place in company with great luxury amongst all classes, as the same statute-book sufficiently demonstrates. After the dissensions caused by the Reformation, and the civil wars which followed in 1640, this alarm wore off; and towards the close of the next century, fears in the opposite direction began to occupy the minds of speculative men. From and after the accession of George III. in 1760, it began to be believed that the people increased faster than of yore.* A writer named Wallace, in an essay "On the Prospects of Mankind," asserted that, from the increase of numbers alone, inevitable calamity must arise; and Dr Franklin published some ideas of the same sort which he had imbibed, from observ-

* For a solution of this curious question, the author can only refer to his treatise on "The True Law of Population." Reasons are there given for believing that, at the Conquest, the population of England was much denser than it was for many centuries after: in short, it seems clear that a decline in the numbers of the people went on from about the reign of Henry III. down to the accession of George III. The following return of freeholders, which was obtained by William III., and was one of the papers in his cabinet, seems to show that, beyond a doubt, the population, about 1690 to 1700, was denser than it was in 1801, when the first census was taken,—

ing a considerably rapid increase amongst the earlier settlers in the wilder state of the American colonies.

"Number of Freeholders in England" (ascertained by order of King William III.), extracted from Appendix to Sir John Dalrymple's Memoirs, Part iii. p. 13.

	Conformists.	Nonconformists.	Papists.
Province of Canterbury ...	2,123,362	93,151	11,878
Province of York	353,892	15,525	1,978
	2,477,254	108,676	13,856

Conformists	2,477,254
Nonconformists	108,676
Papists	13,856
Total Freeholders ...	2,599,786

If from this total we deduct the 599,786, as freeholds possessed by unmarried persons of both sexes, and reckon only four to a family for the rest, this gives a population of *eight and a-half millions* made up of freeholders and their wives and families, to which must be added the non-freeholders, no doubt embracing a considerable number of persons. To those who are startled by this return, it must be observed that, at this period, all cottagers, or nearly all, were owners of their cottage and garden, and that the alternate ridges of a field were frequently separate holdings. In the towns, most tradesmen owned their own houses and shops; and, amongst the poorer sort, each room of a house was often a distinct freehold. Long after the year 1700 also, the more modern practice of consolidating several small farms into one overgrown holding was unknown; consequently farms were very numerous; and as these were then universally let upon a renewable lease for lives, of which the tenant was one, he was for all temporary purposes a freeholder as well as his landlord.

The census of 1801 gave for England and Wales no more, in all, than 8,922,980 persons.

In 1800, however, these notions were compounded into a theory by the Rev. Mr Malthus, a clergyman of the English establishment, who roundly asserted that mankind increased "in a geometrical ratio;" and that as food, he also asserted, only could increase "in an arithmetical ratio," population must always be too large (unless checked by artificial means) for subsistence, and vice and misery be the result. These assumptions were extraordinary enough, especially considering the quarter whence they came; but when the consequences which their inventor evolved from them are calmly looked at, common sense becomes astounded to think how such a notion, leading to such conclusions, ever came to be entertained anywhere. The conclusion of the Rev. Mr Malthus was, that if the people would not abstain from marriage voluntarily, they must be driven to it by severity; and, as a means, he proposed that, if any child or its parents, after a certain date, became destitute, all relief should be denied, and the unfortunate poor left to perish of hunger and cold! It needs no mighty stretch of knowledge to perceive at once that this monstrous scheme strikes not only at the foundations upon which civil society is itself built—at all morality that will bear examination—and at all religion deserving the name—and most especially at the commands of the Jewish and Christian codes, but that it tends directly to create some of the worst crimes that have ever disgraced human nature, including murder of offspring, artificial abortion, unnatural practices, and, at length a civil war on the part of those thus out-

lawed from civil society. It might be supposed by all, except those who recollect the aphorism of the Chancellor Oxenstiern, that considerations so obvious would have deterred any man bearing the name of "statesman" from adopting such a theory as that of Malthus. This, however, was unhappily not the case. It embodied certain attractions for politicians, the deficiencies of whose judgments were not compensated by the rectitude of their hearts. To such, a theory which attributed to the people themselves all the evils that afflict society, and thus exonerated the government from all share of the blame, was invaluable; and to the selfish, who begrudged the sums paid for the relief of the poor (which had become enormous), it was equally acceptable. To many of the political economists, and to some who were powerful with government, the Malthusian principles were therefore "a god-send;" and, marvellous to relate, they were by most unhesitatingly adopted.

Mr Ricardo had, shortly before his death, asserted broadly, that "no alteration of the poor-laws was of any use, unless it were one which led to their entire extinction;" and the Lord Chancellor, Brougham, had said that "he was prepared to defend the principles of Malthus to their full extent." In fact, the Economists, generally speaking, were fully prepared for a crusade against the poor; and by the Economists, the government, unluckily for itself as well as for others, was on this occasion swayed. There were, however, additional motives for the adoption of this unfortunate course by the Whig party. They had,

on the prospect of power opening before them, promised or held out hopes of relief to the country, and more especially to the landed interest. To redeem that promise by the repeal of taxes was, they knew, impossible. They well knew, in fact, that the Duke of Wellington, who really put his shoulder to the wheel of retrenchment, had carried it as far as, under all the existing circumstances, it could be carried. One other course alone, therefore, was open to them, and that was, under the guise of amending the poor-law, to reduce wages to the lowest limit which allowed of life being sustained, and thus decrease the expense of cultivation as well as of manufactures. To carry out this plan elaborate preparation had already been made. Commissioners had been sent into all the counties with instructions to obtain evidence of the working of the existing poor-law. Each of these commissioners had delivered a distinct report, together with the evidence obtained; and from these reports, and that body of evidence, a general report was constructed, from which there is too good reason to believe, that all which told strongly in favour of the Elizabethan law was omitted, whilst all which militated against its policy, or which might seem to do so, was retained.* The bill, based upon this question-

* That the report and evidence, upon which the Poor-law Amendment Act was based, were garbled, the author asserts from direct personal knowledge. The evidence collected in the two northern counties of Durham and Northumberland was highly favourable to the old law, which, in these districts, was honestly, and liberally worked, and with which no one worth mention was dissatisfied.

able document, was artfully drawn. The intent was to make it a bill of abrogation. It came in the guise of a bill of "amendment." But in order to effect the real purpose in view, it became necessary to violate every maxim of constitutional law, for thus alone could the old poor-law be *indirectly* destroyed; and upon the Poor-law Amendment Act, as it unhappily now stands on the statute-book, this stigma must ever remain, for it is indelible. In order gradually to get rid of giving relief at all, which, it unfortunately cannot be doubted was the real view of the authors of the bill, it was found requisite for the legislature to delegate to others powers which do not admit of delegation in any country having the semblance of freedom; in short, it became necessary to give to commissioners, called "Poor-law Commissioners," a power to make at will orders, regulations, or, in other words, ukases, affecting not only the liberties, but the lives, of great numbers of subjects of this kingdom, from which orders or ukases there was no appeal.

Under this bill these commissioners had power to unite many parishes into one unwieldy union—to build gigantic workhouses for these unions, upon any plan they thought proper; to refuse destitute persons relief, unless shut up in these workhouses; when

The whole of the Commissioners' Report, with the evidence, save and except a few sentences, amounting to only a paragraph or two of no consequence, was accordingly suppressed; so that these two counties were all but ignored, together with their population, their extensive commerce and vast mining establishments, in the document upon which parliament proceeded to legislate on this occasion.

there, by an order or regulation, to separate husband from wife, and child from parent, so completely, that in case of the death of any, the others might be ignorant of it; to compel the destitute poor to wear workhouse-dresses; and, lastly, to regulate the diet of these persons at will, so that the fare given might be the scantiest, coarsest, and most miserable possible. This was called the "workhouse test," and its virtue consisted in this, that it was deemed that no person, unless in danger of immediate and hopeless death by starvation, would enter into these workhouses, over the gates of which might have been placed that inscription which Dante has rendered famous by his "Inferno"—"Who enters here leaves hope behind!" Such is the outline of the Poor-law Amendment Act of 1834, as attempted to be carried out by the commissioners appointed under it. It contained, however, one provision which, in the end, neutralized the intentions of its framers, taking those intentions to be as they were described by some of themselves.* It

* "We would not be understood as recommending the *immediate abolition* of the English poor-laws—we are simply desirous of stating the conclusion to which we have been led by the preceding evidence, that *all poor-laws* are, in their essence, impolitic and uncalled for, and that consequently their *final abolition* ought to be the *ultimate object* of any changes that may be made; an object, however, that it is not supposed can be attained without being preceded by years of *careful preparation for it.*

E. Carleton Tuffnell,
P. F. Johnstone,
Commissioners of Inquiry into the Scottish Poor-law."
Poor-law Commissioners' Reports. Appendix A., Part II.

was not deemed politic nor prudent, ostensibly and openly, to put the whole poor of the kingdom of England and Wales under the tender mercies of these commissioners, whose requisites for their office were pretty sure to be the adhesion of each to the opinions, as to poor-laws generally, entertained by the framers of the Act. Between the unfortunate poor, therefore, and the commissioners, were interposed "boards of guardians," whose office it was to be executors of the law, though without power to resist, legally, the orders of the commissioners. It was, probably, hoped by the framers of the Act that the guardians, being "educated men," might be disciples of the philosophy of Malthus. But the majority of educated men never did, and certainly, now, never will, believe in the truth of these revolting *dogmata;* and through the better feelings of the guardians, acted upon, as they soon were, by the press and by public opinion, the scheme was in the end frustrated.

It is painful to have to say that the warmest friends of the memory and good name of Sir Robert Peel must deplore his conduct as to this Act, whatever might be the excuses for that conduct which existed at that period. As a partisan of the bill, when carried through the House of Commons by Lord Althorp, he certainly did not act. In defence of its principles he said nothing; nor did he criticise its details. But he countenanced it, as far as his mere presence and vote could do so; and by so doing he again outraged the feelings of the better members of his party. It is not to be denied that the motives which probably induced

him to take this middle course were very strong; and the course itself was one in exact consonance with his temperament and disposition. That the calm and cautious mind of Sir Robert Peel must have shrunk from any faith in the absurd and outrageous assumptions upon which this bill was based, is tolerably certain; but with the section of Economists, to whom the bill is really to be attributed, he was so connected, unhappily, through their equally pernicious blunders on the subject of money, that he must have felt it impolitic to endanger those ties which bound both to an unfortunate fealty to the ruinous Act of 1819; and hence, although he hardly supported the Poor-law Amendment Act, he did not, as he ought to have done, stand forward to oppose it as the friend of the friendless and the protector of those who, at this time, seemed to have no other, as far as this world was concerned. This was one motive; but there also existed another, of a yet more questionable character, to draw him aside from the line of duty. Sir Robert had beyond a doubt clearly seen, and must have confidently anticipated, that, from the moment of the reform-bill becoming law, a reaction against his Whig opponents must of necessity set in. Their advent to power had given rise to expectations which they wanted the ability and the will to realize; and to the disgust and anger excited by the failure of these exaggerated hopes the poor-law amendment bill, which formed, as it were, an *amateur* outrage on the feelings of the working classes, was well calculated to form the climax. That this was a portion of the calculation of Sir Robert

Peel and the Opposition, the events of a few months go far to prove; and had he acted, at this crisis, as Lords Kenyon, Wynford, Teynham, Eldon, and various others of the Tory party acted, 1834 might have been 1841.*

Whilst these plots were developing themselves in the House of Commons, a split took place in the cabinet, which, singularly enough, ended in the resignation of the Prime Minister; although without any other immediate consequences attending it. It had become necessary to renew, in some form, the coercion-bill for Ireland; and this, it seems, Lord Althorp, aware that his party would have unpopularity enough with which to contend, was only willing to do in a mitigated shape; whilst the aged premier, conscious probably of the extent to which, when out of power, his party had coquetted with the dealers in agitation, was resolved, now that he was in power, to use an exemplary vigour in its suppression. To Earl Grey's vigour in this direction Lord Althorp was, however, resolutely opposed; and, rather than be made the instrument of a longer extension of open and arbitrary government in Ireland, he resigned. The result of

* It is well known that Lord Eldon deemed the Poor-law Amendment-act as one of the most unconstitutional acts ever passed by a parliament; but he was at this time too feeble to oppose it actively. On the 23d July 1834, he writes thus to his daughter: "Heaven grant that this new mode of treating the poor and needy may not bring forth those fruits which I, for one, anticipate. They are to proceed in this hazardous measure to-night; but 'unto their assembly mine honour shall not be united.'"—*Twiss's Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. iii. p. 233.

this sudden step was the dissolution of the Grey administration; for the aged earl, finding that he could not go on without Lord Althorp's assistance in the Lower House, and glad probably to leave a post which was fast becoming the reverse of enviable, was fain to follow the example, and the country on a sudden found itself without a government. The consternation of the liberal party, on the occurrence of this dead-lock, may easily be imagined; for the news was received by the people with pleasure rather than the contrary. It was strongly surmised that the Opposition, well aware of the reaction now setting in, were not averse again to seize the reins of power; and after passing a reform-bill, the effect of which they hoped would be an almost interminable lease of office, to be thus at once deserted by the people at large and deprived of their places, was intolerable even in the prospect. One method of escape only was practicable, and it was adopted. Lord Althorp was prevailed upon to resume his post with the substitution for Earl Grey of Lord Melbourne, a nobleman whose disposition was as easy and pliant as that of his predecessor was stiff and unbending; and thus strangely commenced the "Melbourne Administration," illustrating the fable of "the willow and the oak," which, with every external symptom of inherent debility, was destined (with one short episode) to outlive most of the administrations that preceded it, and all that have followed it. The coolness with which this odd manœuvre was managed afforded considerable amusement out of doors; and some persons, whose sarcasm was more

trenchant than refined, compared it to that of the fox, who is said to walk into the water with a piece of woollen cloth in his mouth, which, as soon as his tormentors have been driven to settle upon it, he sends down the stream; whilst he himself regains the shore, both refreshed and relieved by this adroit operation. That the new ministry should bring the session of parliament, as soon as possible, to an end, surprised nobody. Even their own party had little confidence, at this period, in their stability. They had, for some inexplicable reason, been shortly before deserted by Lord Stanley and by Sir James Graham, the last of whom, after going round the political compass, now assumed the colours of "a liberal Tory." This desertion boded no good; but when it was followed by the forced retirement of Earl Grey, it was surmised that the dissolution of a government, resting nearly alone on Lord Althorp, could not be far distant; and, in the mean time, politicians amused themselves by conjecturing what measures could be brought forward by an administration whose head was known to be as decidedly averse to any further changes of any consequence as any one of the retiring members of the Reform Cabinet.

Such were the position and the estimation of the Melbourne administration up to the prorogation of parliament, which took place on the 15th August 1834. It was not destined, however, to advise the calling of parliament again together; the administration itself being shortly afterwards brought to a brief termination by a decided act on the part of the king, which

not a little surprised the country. It was not generally known that the royal feelings, as to popular measures and men, had undergone a considerable change. The position in which the crown as well as the country had been placed during the closing struggle for the reform-bill had both alarmed and irritated William IV.; and after the retirement of Lord Stanley, Sir James Graham, and the venerable Earl Grey from power, the uneasiness of the Tory party, who had great influence with both king and queen, became deeper than before. It was now found that the administration, denuded of a large share of its former strength and influence, must lean for support upon the extreme party, as to whose designs the most exaggerated notions were, at this period, entertained. Nothing less than a repeal of the corn-laws, the destruction of the Church, and the ultimate erection of a republican system, would, it was supposed, content them; and the dismay of the court grew as its misgivings increased. In the midst of these apprehensions, an event occurred which afforded the court-party, now in a state of deep alarm, a plausible opportunity for acting. On the 10th November 1834, the father of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Earl Spencer, whose strength had been for some time visibly declining, died; and by this event Lord Althorp was at once removed to the House of Peers. The king seized the opportunity to act for himself, as it was his undoubted prerogative to do. He had the authority of Earl Grey for assuming that, without Lord Althorp in the Commons, the ministry could not go on. Upon this assumption he acted;

and when Lord Melbourne waited upon him to propose some modification of the cabinet, as a consequence of Earl Spencer's death, to his utter astonishment, his Majesty informed him that he meant to intrust the arrangement of an administration to the Duke of Wellington, who accepted, accordingly, the offices, provisionally, of Secretary of State and Chancellor of Exchequer. By the Tory party the tidings of this *coup d'état* were, of course, heard with undisguised delight. By the public generally they were received with indifference, though by some of the ultra-reformers with exultation. By the adherents alone of the Whigs, whom the events of the last four years had sadly reduced in number, they were heard with mortification; to which the public indifference as to their fate added no little. In the meantime, Sir Robert Peel, who, excepting his Majesty, was perhaps the person most concerned in this change of political circumstances, was ignorant of all that had occurred. On the prorogation of parliament, he had proceeded, with his family, to the Continent in search of health and recreation; and, at the moment of Earl Spencer's demise, was at Rome. Recalled from Italy by a special messenger, Sir Robert Peel arrived in London on the 9th December, and undertook, with the Duke of Wellington, to form a new administration, in which he was speedily successful.*

* This short-lived administration, formed by Sir Robert in 1834, was as follows:—

First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of Exchequer, Sir Robert Peel; Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst; President of the

That by this hasty *coup d'état* Sir Robert Peel was, without any will of his own, placed in a position of great delicacy and difficulty, is undeniable. Had he been in England at the period of Earl Spencer's death, his habitual caution and vast tact as to the exact state of public feeling, would have led him to advise delay. He doubtless was quite aware of the strength of the reaction which had now steadily set in against his opponents. He unquestionably saw that the eyes of the majority of the nation were now open to the tactics of the Whig party;—and that they clearly perceived that although the reform-bill was wanted to give them a preponderance in political power, to use that power in the furtherance of reforms really calculated to better the condition of the pro-

Council, Lord Rosslyn; Privy Seal, Lord Wharncliffe; Secretary for the Foreign Department, the Duke of Wellington; Ditto Home Department, Mr Goulburn; Ditto Colonies, Lord Aberdeen; First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl de Grey; Master of the Ordnance, Sir George Murray; President of the Board of Trade and Master of the Mint, Mr Alexander Baring; President of the Board of Control, Lord Ellenborough; Paymaster of the Forces, Sir Edward Knatchbull; Secretary at War, Mr J. C. Herries; Secretary for Ireland, Sir Henry Hardinge.

Not of the Cabinet.

Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Haddington; Treasurer of the Navy, Lord Lowther; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Mr Wynne; Postmaster-general, Lord Maryborough; Woods and Forests, Lord Granville Somerset.

This arrangement was, at its commencement, partly marred by the failure of Sir George Murray to obtain a seat for Perthshire,—a failure probably owing to the hasty dissolution of parliament which ensued.

ducing classes was the farthest thing from their thoughts. That this was the conclusion to which the majority had come Sir Robert very well knew; but he knew also that his power must depend upon the result of a general election, and that this must be dubious indeed, even under these circumstances.

That numbers of the electors were disappointed by the conduct of the late ministry was certain enough. They had got "the bill—the whole bill—and nothing but the bill;" but still, when they should come to be placed in the position to do one of two things, it was evident that, owing as they did their votes to the reform-act, few would go the length of voting against the authors of that act. The chances, therefore, were against Sir Robert Peel from the first; and he knew it. Upon what grounds the dissolution of parliament that at once followed the formation of the new ministry was determined, it is hard to conjecture. It was true that, in the then existing House of Commons, the Tory party were in a miserable minority, to all appearance. It was true that to expect that ministers should go on with such a House of Commons was out of the question. But true policy would have suffered the majority to put themselves in the wrong before dissolving them; as the advantage so gained would have overbalanced any possible disadvantages which might have arisen out of a longer delay. In fact, the precipitate dissolution that ensued produced a painful and unpleasant impression upon the public mind. From the moment of the dismissal of the Melbourne cabinet, the organs of the Whigs had laboured every-

where and by every means to produce a conviction that this was an unprincipled *coup d'état;* the work of a violent and unscrupulous faction ensconced behind the throne. Men high in office had, in the bitterness of their mortification and passion, not hesitated to implicate the Queen by name, as the leader of the irresponsible advisers of a violent course; and the Whigs everywhere asserted that the real object of this change was the gradual repeal of the reform-act, and the quasi-restoration of the close-borough system, by means of the gradual narrowing of the franchise. And to this impression there can be no doubt that the precipitate dissolution of Parliament, in the depth of winter and without a trial of its real disposition towards the ministers whom the king had chosen, was calculated to give strength. It looked like a declaration of war "to the knife" against the whole liberal party; and that despite Sir Robert Peel's politic efforts to dissipate this impression, it was so viewed by numbers, is no matter for doubt.

Sir Robert's exposition of his own views as to the reform-act of 1832 is contained in his letter to the electors of Tamworth, put forth on his acceptance of office in December 1834. In this document, after denying that he was ever a defender of abuses or an opponent of rational reformation of such abuses,—he goes on to state, "With regard to the reform-bill itself, I will repeat now the declaration which I made when I entered the House of Commons as a member of the reformed parliament, that I consider the reform-bill a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitu-

tional question,—a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or insidious means." This frank exposition was, as far as Sir Robert was concerned, sufficiently satisfactory and intelligible; but it was not by any means re-echoed in the addresses of others of his party, who, not seeing the lamentable impolicy of blaming measures that cannot be reversed, damaged their own influence by deprecating "the breaking in upon the constitution" by the Act of 1832. Nor was the remainder of the Tamworth manifesto of a nature either to conciliate the enemies or inspirit the friends of the new administration. It consisted altogether of allusions to minor domestic reforms, which, meaning little when employed by his opponents, lost even that little meaning when adopted by Sir Robert, and passed only for plausibilities calculated to catch a few stray and wavering votes.

Another fault was, at this critical moment, committed by the party of which Sir Robert Peel was now the acknowledged leader, and this was the abandonment of their ancient party designation and the adoption of another. "Tory" was silently discarded as a party-name, and the milk and water title of "Conservative," which sounded like the invention of some pastry-cook, adopted. The change was impolitic. It is easy to ask "what's in a name?" But in politics, unfortunately, names do much; and when an ancient designation is thus discarded, the silent inference is that it has become associated with remi-

niscences of which the discarding parties have become ashamed. Such admissions are always mischievous, because no one can say how far they extend, nor to what they apply. To desert, for the unmeaning term "conservative," a party-badge which had been graced by the names of such men as Swift, Pope, Prior, Garth, Parnell, Arbuthnot, Harley, Bolingbroke, and Atterbury, was as false in taste as in judgment; and the result accorded with its antecedents.

The event of the general election, however, occurring as it did under circumstances really unfavourable to the government, sufficiently demonstrated the strength of the reaction which had set in against the late administration. It was evident, upon the face of the returns, that Sir Robert Peel had not obtained a majority, and that his government could not long continue to exist. But it was also clear that parties were now so nearly balanced that to unseat him would be no easy matter for the Opposition, divided as they were upon so many points of policy. A trial of the relative strength of the two parties was immediately made; and its result was indicative of the vast change in public opinion which had taken place. The occasion chosen for thus testing the powers of the two parties in the House of Commons was the election of a Speaker, the first act of every House. A report had been industriously circulated by the Opposition that the late Speaker, Sir Charles Manners Sutton, had been actively instrumental in the dismissal of the last and the installation of the present ministry; and it was resolved, accordingly to oppose his re-election

and propose a liberal, Mr Abercromby, one of the members for Edinburgh, in his stead. This report does not seem to have rested upon very valid grounds. The fact of Sir Charles having attended at a privy-council where the change of ministry was discussed was explained by Sir Robert Peel; and certainly, upon the face of the affair, it was highly improbable that Sir Charles should be rash enough to risk as a political partisan at once his character for impartiality in the chair, and the possible loss of emoluments which equal or perhaps exceed those of the President of the United States. The Opposition, however, feeling their strength, and anxious to dishearten the supporters of ministers at the very outset, resolved upon proceeding; and Mr Abercromby was proposed as a candidate by Mr Denison, one of the members for Surrey, seconded by Mr Ord, one of the members for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, both regular supporters of the Whig party. In the short debate which followed, the personal charge against the late Speaker was not enforced; but it was argued that the House ought now to stamp its own political character by electing a Speaker of those sentiments which prevailed in the House. From the personal charge which had been made against Sir Charles Sutton out of doors, Sir Robert Peel fully exonerated him—

"The only objection of a personal nature (said the right honourable baronet) made against his right honourable friend, was that he had attended some three or four privy-councils which were of a purely formal character. Was that one charge to invalidate the impartiality, dignity, ability, and ex-

perience, manifested during eighteen years? But what was the nature of this accusation? what its amount? If it were not fitting that the Speaker of that House should be a privy-councillor, be it so; let there be a regulation to that effect; but being one, how should he be blamed for performing the duties of the office? An erroneous opinion had got abroad that the meetings referred to were deliberative assemblages. The noble lord opposite was also in error when he said that such councils were attended only by members of the cabinet. Any members of the council might attend, and frequently did so. But their duty was merely ministerial, and they offered not a word of advice to the sovereign. The Speaker being in London, and living in a house assigned him by his Majesty as a residence, and having received a summons to attend, on what ground could he refuse to perform such a duty? In fact, after the Speaker's solemn disclaimer of having been, either directly or indirectly, concerned in the dismissal of the late ministers or the formation of the present cabinet, such a charge was really unworthy of one moment's attention. Nor ought the precincts of the chair to be chosen as an *arena* where political battles were to be fought! He should therefore support his right honourable friend."

On a division, in which the merits or demerits of the candidates were really of no weight, but which was a mere test of strength, Mr Abercromby was chosen by 316 votes against 306 for Sir Charles Sutton,—a majority of ten only. The vote, however, really decided the fate of Sir Robert's administration. It was felt that, in face of an opposition so strong, no talent could enable him long to carry on the business of government; and this certainly decided the future conduct of those who, in all legislative assemblies, have only one rule of action—to vote with the strongest

At the same time that it produced these consequences, this division demonstrated, however, in a way not to be mistaken, the present debility of the Whig party. The little majority of ten was obtained only by the adhesion of a considerable body of the Irish members, a circumstance of which the Premier soon had an opportunity of availing himself.

The Opposition, flushed with their success, which, until the division occurred, was in no little doubt, determined to follow up their good fortune and drive their opponents, if possible, from the field. The division as to the Speaker took place on the 19th February 1835. On the 24th of the same month, the House met for despatch of business, when, in both Houses, an address to the crown was moved as usual, couched in the usual terms. In the House of Peers the address passed after a short debate; but in the Commons Lord Morpeth moved an addition to it, in the form of an amendment, the purport of which was to force upon the ministry an admission of the necessity of a reform in Municipal Corporations, in the church both in England and Ireland, and in the laws affecting dissenters in various ways, and especially as compelling them to contract marriages according to the formula laid down in the established Liturgy. This amendment was sufficiently vague, and was so worded as to allow men of all shades of opinion to vote for it without any strain upon their conscience. It was, however, opposed by Sir Robert, in one of those speeches of dexterous logic and consummate art, in which he far exceeded all the debaters of his time,

and which established for him permanently that command over his audience which the mere florid exaggerations of eloquence (so called) may snatch for a moment, but cannot retain.

Sir Robert commenced by defending the conduct of the King in using his prerogative to dismiss the Melbourne ministry, which, he asserted, was constructed by Lord Melbourne himself upon the express ground of Lord Althorp being his leader in the House of Commons. His Majesty had been assured by Earl Grey that without Lord Althorp in that position the Whig party could not form a government capable of the purposes of a government! What, then, was the King to do? With regard to the great concentration of power in the hands of the Duke of Wellington, he argued it was not without a precedent. Queen Anne's reign afforded one. He himself had not of course the slightest hand in the dismissal of the late cabinet, nor any foreknowledge of that event; but he approved of the course taken, and would if requisite assume a share in the responsibility for that act of the crown. (Hear, hear!) Sir Robert then went on to remark that no human being could have the slightest prior reason for expecting that any cabinet of Lord Melbourne's would be countenanced by those radical parties, especially from the sister country, who were now, strange to say, trying to reinstate it in power! The honourable and learned gentleman opposite (Mr O'Connell) had, in a letter published no very long time ago, treated of the pretensions of various members of the

Melbourne ministry: and how were they treated? Thrown overboard as inadmissible—"and in this fashion (continued Sir Robert) the honourable and learned gentleman disposed first of Lord Duncannon;—then of Lord John Russell;—next of Lord Lansdowne; after him of Lord Plunkett—father of all the Hannibals;—and lastly of Lord Melbourne himself! Is it not clear then (asked Sir Robert) that a Melbourne cabinet had not the faintest hope nor slightest cause to expect support from that party, on which, after all, if in power, its main reliance must be placed? Let me then ask (continued the right honourable baronet) whether it was surprising that his Majesty should, after this, doubt the propriety of continuing the reins of government in the hands of men who three months before rested their sole hopes of success or favour on Lord Althorp?"

The right honourable gentleman then went on to show, that the very men who were now seeking to reinstate Lord Melbourne were more strenuous opponents of former Whig administration than he himself had been. "On the meeting of parliament in 1833, an amendment was moved on the address—'the bloody and brutal' address it was *then* called, by the member for Dublin. (Laughter.) The government resisted it. I supported them, and I was one of that large majority, where, however, the member for Dublin was not. On the first reading of the Disturbances Bill, many opposed the ministers. I, however, supported them. Next came Mr Attwood's motion for inquiring into the causes of the national distress. Many of my opponents

voted with Mr Attwood, but I supported government. So, also, on Mr Harvey's motion relative to the publication of divisions; so, also, on Mr Grote's motion for the ballot; so, also, on Mr Rippon's motion to exclude the bishops from the House of Lords. (Laughter.) Again the government wisely opposed the repeal of the malt-tax; I lent them my assistance. On the motion for altering the corn-laws; for enacting a property-tax in lieu of the malt-duties; on the grant of pecuniary aid to the Irish clergy; on Mr Tennyson's motion for the repeal of the septennial act; on Mr Harvey's motion on the pension-list; on Sir William Ingilby's motion to reduce half the malt-tax; on Mr Buckingham's motion relative to impressment; on Mr Hume's proposal to repeal the corn-law; on Lord Althorp's proposition as to church-rates; on Mr O'Connell's motion to repeal the Union—on all these occasions was I to be found aiding and defending the government. * * * * Look (continued Sir Robert) at the questions I have supported—compare their number, relative importance, and then decide whether I or the ultra-reformers, now so zealous for the Whig party, differed most in views and principles from Earl Grey's government."

Sir Robert then went on to expose the monstrous differences of opinion amongst those whose only point of union was to oppose him. "Is it not evident and palpable (he asked)—is it not manifest, that the framers of this amendment are afraid to advert in it to any one of those measures which certain parties call measures of reform, but in respect to which

they know the real spirit that animates their party? (Laughter.) Why have they not inserted a word about the ballot? (Hear! and a laugh.) Why not a word against the septennial act? Nay, why not a word about the pension-list? And why not a syllable about repeal of the Union? (Cheers, and counter cheers, and laughter.) . Because they know that, of all these measures, there is not one on which they dare to acknowledge a unity of sentiments! — not one! They must go back three or four years to find some topic of common agreement—slavery, for instance, or the reform act itself—all questions practically settled! But they shrink from mention of or allusion to the ballot, extension of suffrage, the pensions, or even the septennial act! Oh, no! The time of *their* union is in truth gone by, never to return. (Cheers.) This very evening I have heard ten notices of motions for carrying further the principles of the reform-act; but they shrink from the slightest indication of opinion on these, because they know it would at once bring on a rupture of their entire squadron, and lead to an open quarrel amongst them!"

Nothing could be at once more cutting and more true than these taunts, and they admitted of only one real answer, which, on some other occasion, was actually given—to wit, that "Whigs were only preferable to Conservatives, because they were held to be more *squeezable!*" After two nights of debate, however, the amendment was carried by the slender majority of seven only; and it became apparent that,

to displace the new ministers, their opponents must hit upon some question on which they could muster a more decided majority, and which, at the same time, should more directly clash with Sir Robert Peel's admitted principles. This, considering how infinitesimally small the real difference was between the Conservatives of 1835 and their Whig adversaries, was no easy matter; but it was at length accomplished. Before adverting, however, to the motion, the success of which was the immediate cause of the displacement of the Peel cabinet, it may be well briefly to advert to a singular speech, made by Sir Robert on a proposal to repeal the duty on malt, which, in 1841, was quoted against him with great effect, and which is remarkable in other points of view.

The repeal of this duty was moved on the 19th of March by the Marquis of Chandos; and in replying to it, and reviewing the possible substitutes, the premier thus expressed himself:—"Now, my prophecy is, you will make that income-tax necessary; to that, be assured, you must come at last if you repeal the malt-tax. You will try your taxes on articles of general consumption—on tobacco, on spirits, and on wine; and you will meet with a storm that will make you hastily recede from your first advances towards a substitute. To a property-tax then you must come (hear, hear, hear!); and I congratulate you, gentlemen of the landed interest, on finding yourselves relieved from the pressure of the malt-tax, and falling on a good, comfortable, property-tax, with a proposal, probably, for a graduated scale! (A laugh, and cheers.) And

you who represent the heavy land of this country—the clay-soils—the soils unfit for barley—you I felicitate on the prospect that lies before you. If you can believe that the substitute will be advantageous to your interests, be it so; but do not, when hereafter you find out your mistake, do not lay the blame upon those who offered you a timely warning, and cautioned you against exchanging the light pressure of a malt-duty for the *scourge* of a property-tax!"

Assuming that the speaker must have anticipated a time (it was not long in coming) when a tax on incomes *might* be indispensable, it is difficult to understand his objection to "a graduated scale;" or why a financier, who must wish a tax to be productive as well as equitable, should shrink from an impost which increases as the sheer superfluity of means to pay it increases. Had the principle been new, or even democratic, Sir Robert might have hesitated; but it was neither, and has been adopted by governments the very reverse of popular.*

* The scale of the income-tax levied by the government of Denmark, where the crown is absolute, is as follows:—

On 4000 dollars income or upwards	. . .	$\frac{1}{4}$
„ 2000 to 4000 „	. . .	$\frac{1}{8}$
„ 1200 to 2000 „	. . .	$\frac{1}{16}$
„ 600 to 1200 „	. . .	$\frac{1}{32}$
„ 300 to 600 „	. . .	$\frac{1}{64}$

Nine Danish dollars are equal to the English £1 sterling; but, owing to the difference of taxation, 600 dollars in Denmark will go as far as £150 in Great Britain. The Danish income-tax was levied only on incomes from land, the funds, and government salaries. Merchants and the professions were exempt.

On the 30th March, the ingenuity of the Opposition enabled them to frame a motion which, in its success, sealed the doom of the brief administration of Sir Robert Peel. On the evening of that day, Lord John Russell moved "that the House do resolve itself into a committee of the whole House, to consider the temporalities of the Church of Ireland." This motion was most cunningly adapted to the end in view. It merely went to assume, indirectly, a power in the legislature to deal with Irish church-property; for, unless the House could deal with it, why consider it? It was a mere abstraction; and being so, was admirably calculated to mollify the tender consciences of the more scrupulous members of the Opposition, whilst it was sure to be aided by every dissenter and every radical in the House.

That Sir Robert Peel would not agree to any such motion was well known; so that, if carried, this was a cheap way of getting rid of him, as it pledged the House to nothing beyond the mere consideration of a certain question, asserting only the right to consider it; and the event showed the depth of the policy that dictated it. The motion was resisted by Sir Robert with every argument that ingenuity could devise. He described it as a proposal merely to affirm an abstract right to deal with a supposed surplus, at some undefined period, which never might arrive. He asked what possible utility there could be in affirming an abstract proposition like this, respecting something the existence of which remained to be proved? It might serve as another firebrand, he said, thrown upon the inflammatory

mass of Irish religious parties; but practical good to any one it could not do. In the course of his address, the Chancellor of Exchequer denied strongly the correctness of Lord John Russell's calculations of the amount of the revenues of the Irish Church. Lord John had called them £890,000. Sir Robert doubted if they exceeded £500,000. In fine, he totally denied the right of any legislature to alienate ecclesiastical property for secular purposes, though he admitted the right of re-distribution. It was, however, even beyond the power of Sir Robert's logic to shake the majority of the House; and, after four nights of debate, the resolution was affirmed by 322 against 289,—being a majority of 33.

Flushed with his success, Lord John immediately moved that the resolution now reported be taken into further consideration to-morrow. Sir Robert Peel, after a vain endeavour to postpone the further debate until Monday, was compelled to acquiesce; and on the day following (April 3d) Lord John Russell moved, "that it is the opinion of this committee that any surplus which may remain, after fully providing for the spiritual instruction of the members of the Established Church in Ireland, ought to be applied locally to the general education of all classes of Christians." This resolution, after two nights of debate, was carried by 262 against 237,—being a majority of 25. This division was on the 6th April, and on the 7th Lord John Russell finally moved, "that it is the opinion of this House that no measure upon the subject of tithes in Ireland can lead to a satisfactory or final adjustment

which does not embody the principle of the foregoing resolution." This resolution, if carried—which, after the two preceding divisions, could not be doubted—involved the resignation of the ministers, inasmuch as it took out of their hands the conducting of the bill for the adjustment of tithes in Ireland, of which notice had been given. The event was not long in suspense. After an evening's debate, during which Sir Robert Peel briefly but earnestly protested against passing such a resolution in the absence of all definite information, the resolution was affirmed by 285 against 258—being a majority of 27—and on the following day the ministers sent in their resignations.

Two political results unquestionably sprung out of this short and singular episode. One was, that Sir Robert Peel, by the nerve and readiness which he displayed, added to his reputation as a first-rate debater and man of business. The second was the confidence in his future strength, which he now acquired from the contemplation of the altered position of his political rivals. This renewal of confidence was quite apparent in those addresses which his presence at certain civic festivals, got up probably for that purpose, enabled him to utter; and the emphatic advice of "Register! register! register!" with which he greeted his friends on one of these occasions, demonstrated that he trusted to open for himself the avenue to future power, and distinctly foresaw a time when he should again hold in his hand the destinies of his country. For the present, however, he seemed certainly doomed for a lengthened period to reap only

the barren honours of a constitutional opposition. No man believed, at the same time, that any long duration could be the fate of the Melbourne ministry; but no one believed that, in any event, Sir Robert Peel could gather round him, on a sudden, sufficient strength to enable him to conduct a government amid the jarring political elements now in active existence.

CHAPTER V.

Recall of the Melbourne Cabinet—Mr O'Connell supports it—His Position and real Designs—Growth of the Joint-stock Banks—Municipal Reform-act—Session of 1836—Irish Municipal Reform-bill—Sir R. Peel opposes it—Altered by the Peers, and dropped by Ministers—Commutation of Irish Tithes—Appropriation Clause—Sir Robert Peel attacks Ministers—Bill amended by the Peers—Amendments refused by the Commons—Violence of O'Connell—Real views of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy—Session of 1837—President Jackson's monetary Measures—A Panic caused in England—Ruin of the Joint-stock Banks and American Trade—Alarm of the Bank of England—Weakness of Ministers—Distress—Mr Walter attacks the Poor-law—Mr Fielden's Statements—Agitation—Sir R. Peel supports Ministers—Confiscation of the Vixen—Mr Roebuck's Conduct—Sir Robert Peel's—Death of William IV.—Election of 1837—Its Results—Revolt in Canada—Lord Durham's Mission—Agitation for the People's Charter—Its Origin—The Birmingham Petition—Session of 1839—Gloomy State of public Affairs—Failure of Crops—Export of Gold—The Bank saved by the Bank of France—War in Affghanistan—Exasperation in Ireland—In Jamaica—Bill to suspend Jamaican Constitution—Sir R. Peel opposes it—Ministers resign.

THE failure of the royal experiment of November 1834 might be said to leave King William the Fourth only one alternative,—and that was, as the least evil under the circumstances, to recall the Melbourne ministry to

power. This course was accordingly adopted; and Lord Melbourne re-constituted, with some slight exceptions, his administration as it existed at Earl Spencer's death. The principal difference was that the woolsack was ultimately the post of Lord Cottenham (the great seal being for a time in commission), instead of Lord Brougham, whose eccentricities (to give them no worse name) had on former occasions been mischievous to the party to which he nominally belonged; who was very obnoxious to the King; and who had so managed as to lose the confidence of every party in the state, with all of whom he had, at some time or other, acted.

Re-constituted under circumstances so singular, the position of the Melbourne administration was not a little extraordinary. Leaving out of the question the Irish members, it possessed in the Commons no majority which would enable it to go on for any length of time. Of the Irish members, Mr O'Connell and the Catholic priesthood of Ireland, to whom he owed his powerful ascendency, swayed the majority. The result therefore was, that upon Mr O'Connell and his coadjutors the Melbourne cabinet was really dependent,—a circumstance not a little alarming to many who did not know the true character of the agitator, and of those from whose support he derived his influence in Ireland. It was inferred by these persons that, under this vital influence, the ministry, however unwillingly, would be compromised by little and little, and gradually forced into democratic measures which they secretly dreaded and disliked. Nor was this

inference an unnatural one. For, had Mr O'Connell been that which he seemed to be; had he really wished to act with the democratic party in England; had his professions of ultra-liberalism in politics, and in religion itself, not been merely assumed for a purpose; had that purpose not been really the subversion of the Protestant, and the transfer of all its possessions to the Catholic Church in Ireland—by which means, joined to a repeal of the Union, Ireland would really have been ruled by a Catholic hierarchy—it is impossible to say what political changes he might not at this period have effected in England, where the people, still excited and agitated by the reform-conflict, were ripe for them. It was no part of his purpose, however, to add to popular power, either in England or in Ireland, where he had, without scruple, met Sir Robert Peel half-way in disfranchising the forty shilling freeholders in 1829. It was, therefore, an easy matter to support the Melbourne ministry, in whose excellent intentions he professed to believe, and to use his opportunities at once to obtain patronage for his followers, and to sap the Church in Ireland without destroying its revenues, which was eventually seen to be no part of his purpose. This, accordingly, Mr O'Connell did; and upon his doing so, manifestly hung the existence of the administration, however broadly Lord Melbourne might deny, when questioned in the House of Peers, any league, tacit or the contrary, with the agitator, securing his support.

As it is no part of the intention of this work to give any detailed account of the strange course of the

Melbourne ministry from 1835 to 1841, when it at last sunk under the general contempt which that course had at length created, it will be only necessary briefly to refer to particular events of importance in which Sir Robert Peel took a part, until the time arrived when political power again fell into his hands almost unsought. Before referring in detail to any of these events, however, it is proper to allude again to one element of temporary strength of which the administration, weak in all other respects, for a short further period reaped the full benefit. This element was the issues of the joint-stock banks, already adverted to, which after 1832 had increased rapidly in number and importance, and now began to be very sensibly felt in the monetary transactions of the kingdom, as well as in the extension of its trade.

Although these banks had now struck root with more or less of vigour in most of the large towns in the kingdom, they flourished most in the manufacturing districts, which are always prone to extensive speculations. By the instrumentality chiefly of these establishments, a large extension of the Yorkshire woollen trade, and also of the Lancashire cotton trade, had been stimulated, and these additional fabrics were principally sent to the United States through the instrumentality of a few London and Liverpool merchants of very great capital, who acted as middlemen, advancing money upon the consignments, and charging a heavy commission upon the sales. This now great increase of the export trade was of course felt in other departments of commerce; the demand for

shipping, for machinery, and for transit-accommodation across the country, was augmented; the prices of wool, iron, and other raw materials improved, and the complaints of stagnation in trade which ushered in the reform-bill, died away for the time. Of this temporary alleviation—for such it only was—the ministers, as usual, took all the credit. A sort of second edition of the "prosperity" of 1823–4–5 came forth; and they whose business it was to paint everything *couleur de rose* made the most of their opportunity. To the happy influences of a liberal administration, the now manifestly greater ease and activity of the commercial and manufacturing classes was unhesitatingly attributed, and a long career of prosperity confidently anticipated for the nation. A very few years sufficed to disperse these visions, but in the meantime the cabinet reaped the benefit of them—no small aid at this critical period; and the public and its rulers, equally incapable of penetrating below the surface of affairs, felicitated each other on the calico-millennium, which reform was believed to have brought in its train.

The principal measure of consequence carried by the Melbourne ministry, during that portion of the session which followed the resignation of the Peel cabinet, was the Municipal Reform-bill. The motive which dictated this reform was obvious. Whatever might have been the hold of the Whig party upon the corporate towns previously to the accession to power of the younger Pitt, it had, since that time, nearly vanished. The enormous expenditure caused by the war of 1793, especially after the establishment of an unlimited

paper system in 1797, and the amount of patronage which such expenditure involved, had, from natural and manifest causes, attached to the administration such men as, from means and station, took the lead throughout the country. The consequence was, that almost every corporate body in England gradually became devoted to the measures of Mr Pitt and his successors; and as their systems of election were close, so they remained. These strongholds of their rivals ministers determined to throw open, and in this they succeeded. They had already, before their dismissal in November 1834, collected a body of evidence which bore hard against many of these corporations,—a circumstance which possibly helped to cause the event which ensued. Reinstated in power, they now preferred a bill founded upon that evidence, which went to establish a uniform municipal system of government in the existing chartered boroughs, and also provided for the erection into boroughs, at the will of their inhabitants, of such other large towns as hitherto had not been granted charters. The whole measure was based upon the principle of the representative reform-act. It provided for the government of the towns by means of a mayor and town-council, but it restricted the franchise of election of councillors to those alone who were rated occupiers of property within the municipal limits or boundaries, and who resided within seven miles of the borough; thus preserving the power to the middle classes, though extending the numbers of those who possessed it. It also embodied a clause which would, in the next generation, have extinguished the race of

existing free burgesses of corporate boroughs—a clause not very consistent with another which preserved to existing freemen all pecuniary or profitable rights vested in them as freemen. The extinguishing clause was, however, eventually abandoned. To this bill Sir Robert Peel offered no opposition, as far as its main principle was concerned; but he objected to the extinction of the existing free burgesses, who in many cases were holders of valuable rights or actual properties, which ought to go down to their descendants and successors; and he also protested against the sweeping condemnation of the ancient corporators in which the proposers of the bill indulged. It was evident, however, that Sir Robert trusted to the Peers for the introduction of any modifications which might be deemed requisite, and the bill, after various alterations through the instrumentality chiefly of Lord Lyndhurst, became law, and formed the really important measure of the session.

The session of 1836, which commenced on the 14th February, was much more stormy than that which preceded it. To two measures the ministers were pledged, both of which were full of difficulty: the first was an extension of the municipal reform-bill to the Irish corporations; the second a commutation of tithes in Ireland. It was known that both these measures would be strongly withstood in the upper House, and not unopposed in the lower. The working of the municipal reform in England and Scotland had been such as to alarm, and with reason, the Conservative party. Almost without an exception, the ancient

borough corporators had been thrown contemptuously overboard by the new electors—the consequence of which was, that most of the town-councils were entirely ruled by a ministerial majority, feebly opposed only by a few Conservative or Radical councillors. The result, or a worse, in Ireland, was of course apprehended, and this apprehension gave redoubled energy to the opposition. To the bill for dealing with Irish tithes the Conservative party were yet more bitterly opposed. After that resolution of the Commons which forced the Peel administration to retire from power, no tithe-bill for Ireland could be introduced which did not contain a clause appropriating any surplus to secular purposes of education, and in this the Conservative party believed they saw the ultimate destruction of the Irish Protestant Episcopal Establishment. Upon these points an ultimate collision with the Peers was therefore to be dreaded, unless, which was not now to be hoped, the attitude of the people of both countries should be such as to awe the Lords into an unwilling acquiescence.

The bill for reforming the corporations of Ireland was introduced into the House of Commons in the month of February, after some discussions respecting Orange lodges, in the course of which much party heat was evolved, the common destiny of all Irish discussions; against which Sir Robert Peel, in a highly moderate and admirable address, struggled in vain. It was a tolerably close copy of the Act for Great Britain, with some alterations dictated by circumstances. As there was at that period no poor-law in Ireland, the

municipal franchise was placed upon a rental of £5 or upwards. In other respects the bill resembled in its general provisions that passed during the preceding session of Parliament. To the principle of the bill Sir Robert Peel had nothing to object. He admitted the necessity of some measure of municipal reform for Ireland, but contended, that a measure which might work equitably in England or Scotland might work vast injustice in the neighbouring kingdom, where the dissensions of religion and of race were more fierce and bitter. Sir Robert expressly denied the view of the attorney-general for Ireland, that the majority of corporate bodies in Ireland had been originally intended to promote a popular and self government amongst the native Irish. There were, he said, 95 corporations in Ireland, but of these Sir Robert averred that about 80 were governed by charters either granted by James I. or subsequently; and the intention of all James's charters, and all the subsequent ones, was, Sir Robert affirmed, to form close corporations representing wealth alone, as a prop to Protestant ascendency. To turn all these corporate boroughs into bodies which Mr O'Connell described as "normal schools of agitation," would, he argued, be unfair and unjust to Protestant interests.

It had been objected, and perhaps justly, to the old corporate sheriffs, that they selected grand juries to meet the views of a faction. How, inquired Sir Robert, are we to find any security that popularly elected sheriffs will be a whit more impartial or less unscrupulous in consulting the leanings of the party who elect

them? Sir Robert contended further that the bill, in many cases, gave undue and improper powers to town-councils. In various instances, there were harbours belonging to incorporated boroughs which were separately managed by commissioners; but if this bill, as now drawn up, became law, the new town-councils would supplant the commissioners—a result against which he earnestly protested. These commissioners were appointed as being peculiarly fitted for this description of trust, and ought not to be superseded by less capable persons. Sir Robert did not oppose the second reading of the bill, which passed this stage without any division, although his real objection to the bill, that it would merely be a transfer of influence from Protestant to Catholic, struck directly at its principle, and could only be avoided by a destruction of all Irish incorporations for municipal purposes—a measure which, as soon as the House went into committee, was proposed by Lord Francis Egerton. This sweeping proposition was, however, rejected by the Commons, and the bill passed, without any very material alteration, as proposed by ministers: Sir Robert Peel in the meantime, who acted throughout with a studied show of moderation, no doubt knowing the fate which was preparing for it by the Peers.

Their Lordships had perceived that the alterations which they inserted in the municipal reform-bill for Great Britain had been viewed by the public with acquiescence, if not with sympathy, and that the whole measure was seen to be that which it was, an insidious attempt, under pretence of reform, to gain strength

for a political faction. This being the case, the Peers rightly judged that, in the state in which public opinion now was, they might deal with the Irish corporations, as to which the British public knew little, and cared less, as might appear to themselves most fitting; and this they accordingly did. They suffered the bill to come into a committee of the whole house; they passed that portion of it which went to overturn the existing corporate charters in Ireland; and then, striking out all the clauses that went to establish the new municipal institutions, introduced legal machinery for dealing with such property as the Irish corporations possessed, and for carrying on such local regulations as local necessities called for. This was, in fact, a throwing out of the ministerial measure. The ministers proposed to remodel the Irish corporations. This bill, as altered by the Peers, swept them away. It was destruction in the place of reconstruction, and the House of Commons felt it to be such.

That the Irish members should be highly exasperated by this act of the Peers was neither unnatural nor unpardonable; but that those English members, who had in vain attempted to force upon the Whigs an inquiry into the state of the country, and who had opposed their attempt to sacrifice the poor in order to shield the landed interest, where corn-laws would not do it, from the effect of their own monetary measures; that those members should fail to see in this conduct of the Lords a just and righteous retribution, is one of the remarkable features of the time; that it was so felt by the ministry need not be doubted. Notwith-

standing the violent language of Mr O'Connell, and other members professing popular opinions, they seemed quite aware that public opinion would no longer be roused in their favour; and they tried by means of a compromise to induce the Commons to eat the leek which it was in vain to reject. Excepting only twelve Irish corporations from the sweeping extinction of the Lords, they consented to make a peace-offering of the rest, and in this certainly humble modification they induced the Commons to acquiesce. The Peers, however, perceiving their victory was now safe, were inexorable. They rejected even this qualified submission, and refused to pass the Commons amendments, who were thus reduced to the necessity of silently dropping the bill, which was done; the people all the time contemplating this strange but instructive scene with total apathy.

Seeing how completely the aid of public opinion had left the party in power, the House of Lords felt itself in a position to resist other measures, the tendency of which it disliked as much as that of the Irish municipal reform-bill. The Melbourne ministry and its supporters had for some time cherished the project of putting the collection of tithe upon a different footing. In both countries it was felt that the existing usage which enabled the clergyman to take his tithes in kind, was productive of much evil, from which the interests of the Church itself were not exempt. In the earlier periods of Christianity tithes had been yielded voluntarily. As the laity became at length jealous of the vast wealth of the Church, it was found

to be necessary to aid the collector of tithe by a law. In modern times, after dissent became widely spread, disputes between the rector or vicar and his parishioners, arising out of this demand, were frequent; and in Ireland, where Catholics and Presbyterians form five out of every six of the population, lamentable scenes were constantly occurring, especially in the south of Ireland, where the people are nearly all Catholics. It was therefore both a laudable and a natural wish on the part of the ministry to hit upon some mode of collecting this impost, by which these perpetual feuds, so pernicious to all religion, might be lessened or obviated. In this design the ministers undoubtedly had the House of Lords with them. Composed for the most part of great landholders, the Peers personally felt the evil of the existing usage as to tithes; the real amount of which, being a matter of uncertain estimate, was productive of frequent differences between landlord and tenant. Upon the general question, therefore, the Houses were tolerably agreed; but when the Irish tithes came in question, the old bone of contention appeared. In order to get rid of Sir Robert Peel and his cabinet, the Whig party had been driven to the dangerous step of assuming that the Irish ecclesiastical revenue was more than sufficient for religious purposes, and of assenting to a resolution for the appropriation of the supposed surplus to secular purposes. By means of this they had wrecked the government of Sir Robert Peel. Under their altered circumstances, they were now themselves to be all but destroyed by it.

The Irish Tithe Commutation-bill was brought into the House of Commons on the 25th April by Lord Morpeth, in a sort of way which showed that he foresaw the fate of the measure, and winced under the necessity which compelled him to introduce it. Of this evident reluctance as to the fatal appropriation clause, Sir Robert Peel described the true character in one of those happy quotations for which he was remarkable, and which contrasted so favourably with the hackneyed and school-boy passages from Virgil, with which his rival, Canning, used to contrive, by aid of a fine voice and some modest assurance, to electrify a House of Commons not very deeply read in the classics.* Oppressed by the anticipation of failure, Lord Morpeth finished a feeble speech by moving "that it is expedient to commute the composition of tithes into a rent-charge, payable by the first estate of inheritance, and to make further provisions for the better regulation of ecclesiastical duties;"—a resolution which passed without a division. There was, however, sufficient opposition in store for the bill. It was struggled against not only by Sir Robert Peel and the Conservative party in the Commons, but also by the section denominated Radicals, who accused the Conservatives of sheer hypocrisy in shrinking from an "appropriation clause," when they were ready to pass another of a far worse character. The

* Sir Robert's description of Lord Morpeth's unhappy manner was from a satire of Horace (the Ninth), and is very rich:—

"Demitto auriculas, ut iniquæ mentis asellus,
Cum gravius dorso subiit onus."—

bill, somewhat inconsistently, as it was held to be a benefit in various ways to the owners of land, deducted *thirty per cent.* from the estimated tithe, and this Mr. Hume and the extreme party resisted. They affirmed it was mere pillage to vote *thirty per cent.* of the tithes to go into the landlord's pocket; whilst it was only justice to devote an ascertained surplus to educational purposes. Thus, two parties were opposed to the bill, who rarely united to oppose anything else. The fate of the measure was, however, soon virtually decided.

On the 1st of June, Lord Stanley, who was opposed to the appropriation principle, and who contended that no practical result could follow its adoption, moved for leave "to bring in a bill for the conversion of tithe-composition into rent-charges, and for the redemption thereof; and for the better distribution of ecclesiastical revenues in Ireland." Upon the decision which was to follow this motion hung a double issue. If it were carried, the destruction of the ministry was involved; if it were lost by only a small difference of numbers, it decided the fate of the ministerial bill, which, after such a division, would certainly be rejected by the Peers. After three nights' debate the motion was rejected by a majority of thirty-nine only, which virtually settled the doom of the ministerial measure in the House of Lords. That measure, however, was sedulously pressed through the House of Commons, and after an angry debate in committee, a division, on the appropriation clause, ended in favour of ministers by the narrow majority of only 26—290 voting for it, and 264 against it.

This decided the fate of the bill in the lower House, which was accordingly read a third time, and passed on the 15th of July. The course taken by the Peers was similar to that which they adopted as to the Irish Municipal Reform-bill. They suffered the bill to go into committee, but, when there, they struck out all the clauses that related to the appropriation of an assumed surplus, and raised the rent-charge, in lieu of tithe, from seven-tenths to three-fourths of the estimated value of the tithe; so altering, at the same time, its distribution, as to render nugatory all anticipation of an actual eventual surplus.

The fate of the ministry now, of course, depended upon their power to persuade the House of Commons rather to reject the measure *in toto*, than accept it so metamorphosed; and in this they succeeded, though with some difficulty. On the 2d of August, the amended bill having come down from the Lords, Lord John Russell moved that "the Lords' amendments be taken into consideration on this day three months." He grounded his motion on various considerations, one of which was, that as the bill partook of the nature of a money-bill, any alteration by the Lords was against the privileges of the Commons. He then contended that it was useless to pass such an abortion, as it would add to instead of diminishing discontent in Ireland; and this being the case, instead of finally settling the tithe-question for Ireland, it would only involve the certainty of its being re-opened at a future time. The motion was resisted by Sir Robert Peel, who first denied that the amended bill, as it stood,

interfered in any way with their privileges,—a position which, when appealed to, the Speaker, without affirming it, did not very distinctly deny. Sir Robert then went on to argue that, if the sentiments of Irish agitators were to be a guide, no bill, short of one for taking the entire tithe away, could ever be held to be a settlement of this question. He, however, would not be so guided; and he implored the House not to abandon so fair an opportunity for putting the future collection of the revenue of the Irish establishment upon a footing practically so good.

After a spirited debate, Lord John carried his point by 260 against 231, giving him the narrow majority of 29 only. This vote may be considered as finishing the really important business of the session. A bill (without any appropriation clause) for commuting English tithes had been willingly passed by both Houses, opposed only by the few ultra-liberal members of the House of Commons, who protested against taking a shilling from a clergyman to put it into the pocket of a landlord, as the worst of appropriations; and the other measures were of minor importance. From the rejection of this measure, however, one consequence resulted—a great accession to the enormous power of Mr O'Connell over the Irish population. His denunciations acquired additional force; and he asserted, in no measured terms, that he would either agitate for measures to recast the constitution of the House of Peers, and thus settle the tithe-question, or else, if pushed to the alternative, settle it by a total destruction of tithe in Ireland. That he

had it in his power to realize the last threat few people doubted; and deep alarm was caused by it amongst those who did not know the real aims of "the Liberator," as he was called, and his clerical supporters. With those who knew the character and true intentions of Mr O'Connell, the threat passed for little. Nothing was further from the wishes of the Roman-catholic priesthood, and their champion, than any actual diminution of tithe in Ireland; and its destruction they would have deprecated just as sincerely as their Protestant rivals. Their real object was to weaken, by the Whig measure, the Irish establishment, and in the end to transfer its revenues to themselves. Hence, to destroy tithe by any universal resistance to its payment, was no part of O'Connell's true purpose; although the threat of such a cessation was often a weapon in his hands. When the matter became really critical in Ireland, he paid his tithe, and influenced the rest to follow the example; but, for the moment, the very threat created general alarm, and most men doubted whether the impost could now be long collected in that unfortunate country.

The year 1837 opened under less favourable auspices than the preceding year had exhibited. The government had made the most of the temporary sunshine created by the issues of the joint-stock banking establishments, and they were now to front the consequences of that reaction which, under such a system, is sooner or later sure to follow. The first blow came, on this occasion, across the Atlantic. In the United States of North America there had, from and after

the declaration of independence in 1775, risen by degrees a system of paper issue, more recklessly conducted, for the most part, and frequently more disastrous in its vicissitudes, than the worst of the European systems of fictitious money.* As a portion of this system, there had, at length, been erected in the state of Pennsylvania, for the most part by the aid of British merchants and capitalists, a gigantic establishment, with branches extending over many and indeed most of the States, under the title of "The Bank of the United States." This bank was set up under the auspices of the American Federalist or Whig party; and so great was the influence which, by means of its extensive commercial accommodation, it had acquired, that its directors and friends, both in America and Great Britain, were unwise enough to boast openly that they, through the means of this establishment, were in a fair way to control, to a great extent, the general government and many of the state-governments of the republic. This ill-judged exhibition of intentions, of course odious to the democratic party of the American commonwealth, was certain to create a political reaction hostile to the establishment, which, whilst it appeared merely to be the instrument of commercial accommodation, it escaped. This reaction had now done its work. The democratic party throughout the Union, headed by the popular and celebrated General Jackson, had

* To those who are anxious to inquire into the monetary history of the United States, "Gouge's History of Banking"—an ill-written but trustworthy book—will afford the desired information.

caused that extraordinary man to be twice chosen President of the United States; on the last occasion with the avowed determination to destroy utterly the now hateful United States Bank. In this work of demolition the President, despite the natural and desperate resistance of the commercial portion of the community, was now nearly successful. He was backed by the entire body of farmers, all owners of land, who had suffered to an amazing extent by the vicissitudes of the unstable paper-currency of the republic; and by their aid he was enforcing a return to metallic money, and making all paper securities of the nature of bank-notes legally convertible into coin on demand. In furtherance of these ends, he had refused, in virtue of the power vested in him, to renew the charter of the United States Bank. He had taken from it all deposits of public money; and he had prohibited the receipt of its paper in payment of taxes.

This tremendous conflict could not however go on, even across the Atlantic, without putting in jeopardy a huge amount of British interests. Under the auspices of the United States or "Biddle's" Bank, as it was called, from the name of its manager, an overgrown trade had sprung up between Great Britain and the States, which, on the American side, had become bloated to an extravagant degree. So enormously did the value of the manufactures sent out to the States exceed the value of all the produce transmitted by the States to England, that, when the crisis occurred, it was believed the balance owing to Great Britain was about *twelve millions sterling*. The pressure be-

gan in 1836, and was continued through 1837, and the result was that this huge sum was mostly, if not entirely, lost. As the struggle between the President and the bank increased in intensity of resolve, the manager Biddle, partly compelled by the cash-payment measures, and partly in order to exasperate to the highest pitch the passions of the trading community, reduced his issues to such an extent that the acceptors of bills, drawn by English houses in the course of the bloated trade then at its height, could not find means to retire them, and the whole was, in the majority of cases, lost. As this became known in England, the alarm increased. At first, the Bank of England supported the English houses, in hopes that the Americans would find means to meet a portion of their liabilities. This hope was, however, little realized by results; and the bank at last, alarmed by the export of gold caused by President Jackson's measures, and by the state of all American accounts, rejected all bills drawn by merchants in any way involved in this trade, and reduced the paper in circulation so materially that great ruin followed. Almost every commercial firm trading to the States was forced into the bankrupt list, and many of the provincial joint-stock banks implicated in the export-trade to America, were stopped or crippled. The ultimate consequence was a stagnation in trade that lasted until about 1843, when events wrought another temporary alleviation.

The parliamentary session of 1837 was opened on the 31st January, under a gloomy political atmos-

phere. The American bank-conflict and its effects here had finished the transient monetary alleviation created by the reckless issues of the joint-stock banks, many of which the reaction had prostrated. As a natural consequence, languid markets, falling prices, stagnation of trade and of manufactures, and an extensive want of employment, were visible everywhere, but most of all in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire, where the distress was appalling. This was sufficient of itself to embarrass a weak and incapable ministry; but it was immensely aggravated by their own favourite measure, the Poor-law Amendment Act.

What the real intent of the authors and advocates of this Act was, has already been made manifest; and that intent the three commissioners, to whose tender mercies the unfortunate poor of England and Wales had been abandoned, were now gradually endeavouring to reduce to practice. With this view, in various districts where they had caused huge prison-like workhouses to be built, they had actually issued orders for all out-door relief to be refused; whilst they, step by step, were engaged in so aggravating the condition of the inmates of these gloomy walls, forbidding them even to leave their prison to attend divine service, that no one, unless pressed by the agonies of actual starvation for themselves or their families, would enter their gates, where separation of husband from wife and parent from child they knew awaited them. To this refusal of relief the catastrophe of the American export-trade put, in many districts, a sudden end. At Notting-

ham the crowd of applicants was so great that no building could hold a fifth part of them, and out-door relief or a serious riot became the alternative. In Lancashire similar scenes were enacted; and the disclosures of some practices resorted to by the keepers of these receptacles became so shocking and disgusting, that public indignation to a high degree was the assured result; and as the *Times* and some of the other journals on this occasion did their duty, the revulsion of public opinion became irresistible, and the ministers, weak before, shrank under it, and began to disavow designs which every one knew to be entertained.

As the position of the ministers and their supporters in the House of Commons became more and more untenable, the hopes of the Conservative party rose, and they now saw a way opening, if not to the vast power which they at one time wielded, yet, at all events, to place and patronage. They perceived clearly enough, that the Melbourne cabinet had lost not only the confidence but the respect of the majority of the nation; and that on an exigence they, in reality, leaned for aid upon the Irish and the few English Radical members; men who agreed in little else than the determination to support that government when in jeopardy, which, at other times, they were accustomed to denounce as unworthy of any support. That the nation should lose confidence in an administration so circumstanced was not surprising. The exaggerated hopes excited by the reform-act had ended in utter and bitter disappointment. The

rulers of the country, it was seen, wanted either the will or the power, or both power and will, to grapple with its difficulties; and men began instinctively to turn to the practical character of Sir Robert Peel, as that of a man more likely to confer some substantial benefit than those who promised more but did nothing. This tendency of the public mind had been evinced in the election at the University of Glasgow, where Sir Robert was chosen Lord Rector for the year, in opposition to Sir John Campbell, then attorney-general, by a very large majority. Other symptoms of the same reaction were not wanting; and such was the change in the public sentiment, that when the session of 1837 began, few persons believed the ministry could hold together until its close, and the hopes of the Conservatives of a return to power under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel became proportionately stronger.

To chronicle the abortive legislation, or rather attempts at legislation, of one of the most fruitless sessions of parliament upon record, would be useless and irrelevant. The business of government had in fact, as was openly said by Mr Roebuck and others, been reduced to that which is familiarly called "a dead lock." The two Houses were in perpetual collision, and by their adverse action neutralized each other. Thus, although the ordinary business of parliament, and especially the voting of the supplies, was carried on without much debate, no step of the slightest consequence was allowed to be taken; the Lords either opposing direct negatives, or else postponing

the discussion until it was too late to proceed. This last course was taken with a third Irish municipal reform-bill; and a tithe-bill for Ireland, and a bill to put an end to the collection of church-rate, were finally frustrated by similar manœuvres. The Peers, aware that the government had lost all popular sympathy and active support, were resolved to render it, by degrees, utterly contemptible; and in this they certainly succeeded. No British ministry on record ever continued to hold power amidst so much hatred without and so little of cordial support within the legislature.

The really important questions of this unmeaning session may be said to be the motion of Mr Walter, one of the members for Berkshire, for inquiry into the working of the Poor-law Amendment Act, and the debate on Mr John Arthur Roebuck's motion for papers connected with the illegal confiscation of the British merchant vessel "Vixen" by the Russian government. Mr Walter's motion, which was made on the 24th of February, was, "that a select committee be appointed to inquire into the operation of the Poor-law Amendment Act, and to report their opinion to the House." This proposal was enforced by Mr Walter in an address of very great ability and power, in the course of which the honourable member entered into details which, unless the House had been composed of beings altogether removed from the ordinary impulses of human nature, could not but produce an irresistible effect. To these details it would have been easy to have added others of even a

more revolting character; but, as it was, the speech produced a great impression upon the country, and added fuel to an agitation which (as it could not fail to do) all but extinguished the last remains of the popular influence which the Whig party once possessed. Mr Walter was, on this occasion, seconded by Mr John Fielden, one of the members for the borough of Oldham, in Lancashire,—a man of undoubted honesty and sincerity of purpose, as well as of solid unpretending talent, to which he added vast wealth and extensive influence over the whole manufacturing districts, where he was looked upon, emphatically, as the working-man's friend. Mr Fielden's address, less detailed than that of Mr Walter, was still more direct and straightforward. He distinctly told the House that he was opposed to the entire Act, which was false in principle, and iniquitous in its provisions; and which, in fact, amounted to a sentence of outlawry against the poor, whose liberties and lives were by its means, contrary to every maxim of British government, put at the mercy of three irresponsible despotic commissioners, whose ukases were to have the effect of law.

Mr Fielden directly charged the commissioners not only with gross mistakes but intentional falsifications in their published reports, similar to those which unquestionably pervaded the report upon which the Act was founded; and, in conclusion, he assured the House, that north of the Humber, where the poor-law of Elizabeth had been honestly worked for the most part, the new Act would never be submitted to; and that he himself, and the whole population of the

district in which he lived, were prepared to resist its introduction to the uttermost. Against the high characters and sincerity and honesty of purpose both of the proposer and seconder of this motion, no one dared to breathe a syllable; and the speeches of both, differing as they did from the specious and hollow effusions to which both Houses are too much accustomed, produced a great effect upon the Commons, backed as they were with petitions of a most decided nature from all parts of the country. Under these circumstances, the ministry, aware of their tottering condition, and of the growing power and strength of the agitation out of doors, were compelled to succumb. Lord John Russell did not dare to meet the proposition with a decided negative. He contented himself with moving an amendment, which was so more in name than substance, so little did it vary the original proposal of the member for Berkshire; and this slight difference, after two nights of debate, he explained away, in order to escape a division, which might have been perilous both to the measure and the ministry.

The committee was of course appointed. The conduct of Sir Robert Peel, on this occasion, partook of the worser side of his character. It was all evasion and apology. He had voted for the Act as a whole when proposed by Lord Althorp, but cautiously eschewed taking any prominent part in the transaction; and no one doubted at the time that this silent acquiescence was given in deference to the Economist party, with whom, regarding other matters, he was unfortunately, both for his country and himself, inextricably en-

tangled. In their present distress he was looked to for aid, and he gave it after a fashion. Sir Robert, in his short speech on this occasion, set out by declaring that the "saving" of two millions in poor-rate, so boasted of, had no charms in his eyes. He averred that no such saving entered into the catalogue of his motives in supporting the Act; and that he did so because he believed that in the main it was calculated to "raise the moral character of the working-class" and "diminish idleness and profligacy." The rest of his address consisted in apologizing for the cases of cruelty which time had divulged as soon following the enactment, by saying, that such exceptions were inseparable from a great measure, and that he, for one, was ready to inquire into and alleviate such cases.

Sir Robert seems to have forgotten that the great benefit insisted upon by the advocates of the Act was to be the fruit of the immediate diminution and gradual withdrawal of all relief; and that, in the House of Peers, Lord Brougham's grand appeal was to the pocket; that learned person exclaiming towards the end of his harangue, to finish the climax, that "if something were not done to stop relief being given, their lordships' estates would be swallowed up, and he himself, Lord Brougham, must become a Westmoreland pauper;"—as if that were a catastrophe enough to interrupt the harmony of the spheres. This Sir Robert appeared to forget; nor did he notice the conclusion that follows his own position at setting out, viz. that the saving, of which he made so light, must have arisen altogether from a refusal to pay "idleness

and profligacy;" this idleness being attributed to a people who notoriously perform double the work of any nation on the face of the globe, excepting perhaps the population of the New England States of North America; and this dissoluteness, to a nation celebrated for its decent observance of religious duties, and for contributing to the maintenance of religion more than all the rest of Europe united. That this course, on the part of Sir Robert Peel, contributed in part to the exclusion of himself and his friends from power for nearly four years from that time, seems hardly doubtful. It checked that popular reaction against Lord Melbourne's administration which afterwards destroyed it, and chilled the influence over the national mind which Sir Robert's great practical talents and deep knowledge of mankind always enabled him to attain. The industrious classes for once saw him in open league with those whom they could not but consider as their deadliest and worst enemies, and they were sorry for it. But sorrow, though it may grace alienation, does not cure it; and the consequences remained in due time to follow.

In a national point of view, the debate on the seizure and confiscation of the British trading vessel "Vixen," was of importance equal to that on the atrocities perpetrating under the "amended" poor-law. It deeply affected the character of this country and its legislature, as well as its executive, in the eyes of all the nations of the world; and it undoubtedly helped to bring about consequences which, through a long period, the British nation may have too much

reason to deplore. It has been already remarked, that the policy of Russia, from and after the sudden and mysterious death of the Czar Alexander, at the remote station of Taganrog, in December 1825, had materially changed; and under the guise of respect for national rights, treaties, and the stability of existing governments, had consisted of a course of insidious aggression upon neighbouring powers, all carried on under specious pretexts, but with the unchangeable design of extending further and further the territory, power, and political influence of the czars, as well as the religious influence and spread of the Greek form of Christianity, which were represented to be identical. The means taken to promote these ends were as cunning as the ends themselves were unprincipled and rapacious. Wherever internal dissensions or jealousies betwixt nation and nation could be fomented, the agency of Russia was active: and under the guise of mediation and then protection, the sway of Russia was gradually extended over province after province of the various powers on her extensive frontier. By these acts, Persia was despoiled and finally subjected to the orders of the Czar. Under these orders, Herat was assailed with a view to open a road through Candahar and Cabul to British India; whilst, in the Punjaub and in Cabul, Muscovite agency fomented hostility against the British acquisitions in the peninsula of Hindostan.*

* "On the afternoon of the 19th December 1836, a Russian officer, named Vickovich, entered the city of Cabul."—*Kaye's Wars in Affghanistan.*

On the side of Turkey in Europe a continual career of encroachment was pursued, with the design of gradually disorganizing the Turkish power, and ultimately driving the Sultan from Europe. By a mixture of violence and treacherous diplomacy, the rich Turkish provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia had become virtually Russian; and the sway of the Russian government at Constantinople itself, and the privileges of Russian subjects resident in Turkey, had, after the treaty of Adrianople, become such as to be incompatible with the proper sovereignty of the Porte. On the Danube, one of the grand outlets of Germanic commerce, her encroachments were equally outrageous. By the treaty of Vienna, to which all the great European powers were party, the navigation of this magnificent river was declared to be free. At Adrianople, however, Russia compelled the Turks to cede to her the uninhabited islands which form part of the Delta made by the current where it joins the Euxine, but which belonged to Turkey. The insidious intent, in due time, became apparent.

Under pretence of enforcing a quarantine regulation, Russia erected forts which command the Sulina mouth of the river, which is its navigable channel. By degrees, tolls were enforced upon merchant vessels entering the river; and, as a final step, the Czar took upon himself the duty of keeping the channel clear of the accumulating mud constantly brought down by the current. The result has been that this duty is purposely neglected, and instead of twelve feet, eight feet of water only now exist; the purpose being to

choke the trade of the Danubian provinces, in order to foster that of Odessa. Long prior to the year 1837, the Czar in furtherance of his design to subjugate Turkey and break up the Ottoman empire, had been waging a murderous war with the tribes inhabiting Circassia, a strong and mountainous country on the north-east border of the Euxine. This bloody conflict, which was wholly unprovoked on the part of the Circassians, who were, and always had been, *de facto*, an independent nation, was carried on by the Muscovites with very indifferent success. After vast loss of life, they were totally unable to establish any permanent footing in this wild region, which here presents an insurmountable bar to further aggression. To assist them in this vain struggle to enslave these invincible mountaineers, who are as renowned for the bravery of their men as for the exquisite beauty of their women, the Russians had taken upon themselves to prohibit all trade with the coast of Circassia. Upon what precise ground this pretended right of prohibition was based it is difficult to say; two grounds, totally incompatible with each other, being successively put forward to justify the capture and sale of the Vixen and her cargo. Both, it will be seen, were untenable; but before entering upon this stage of the matter, it is necessary to state, briefly, the very singular circumstances under which this British merchantman sailed for the Circassian coast.

Amongst the better qualities of King William IV., it has been noted that he cherished strong feelings to the necessity of preserving intact amongst foreign

nations the honour and influence of the country which it was his lot to govern. Hence the king had beheld with indignation the various unchecked aggressions of the Czar; and was especially moved when made acquainted with the insolent and illegal prohibition which would prevent British subjects trading with Circassia. In fact, so strong were the royal feelings on this point, that, unaware of the secret obstacles to such enterprises, he took actual steps to bring the mercantile question to an issue; not doubting probably that he must of course be supported by his responsible ministers in a matter involving the honour and character of the nation.* Thus encouraged, Mr George Bell, a merchant of London, determined, in order to try the question, to send a cargo of salt to the Circassian coast. This intention was however at once made known to the minister for foreign affairs, Lord Palmerston, whom Mr Bell consulted before putting his resolve into execution. It appears that Mr Bell wrote to the Foreign Office in the first place, inquiring if there were any "restrictions" on the trade with Circassia which were recognised by government, adding that he intended to send a cargo of salt.

* "The king so warmly entered into it, that a letter was written by his private secretary, stating the great service to his country which any merchant might so render. This letter was shown to Mr Bell, and was the origin of the voyage of the Vixen. I owe it to Mr Bell, who is now dead, that in all the misery and subsequent ruin incurred thereby, he never once alluded to that letter, on which alone the step was taken; and yet he had authority to do so."—*Urquhart's Progress of Russia in the West, North, and South.* 5th Edition, p. 318.

To this he received an evasive reply, so worded as to imply that the purport of his question had been misunderstood at the Foreign Office. Mr Bell, however, knowing that vessels on the coast of Circassia had been warned off by the cruisers of Russia, wrote more specifically, asking whether "*the* Russian blockade on the Black Sea to the south of the river Kouban was recognised by the British government?" In reply he was referred to the "Gazette, in which all notifications such as those alluded to by you are made." As the Gazette was without any notice either of blockade or restrictions instituted or imposed by Russia, Mr Bell conceived he was safe, and the Vixen sailed, Mr James Bell, brother of the freighter, going out as supercargo, and the adventure being so far known to and countenanced by the British government, that Mr James Bell, the supercargo, took out despatches to Lord Ponsonby, at that time British ambassador at Constantinople. On his reaching Constantinople, it appears that Mr James Bell, the curator of the cargo, who had preceded the ship at Constantinople, still having doubts as to the safety and legality of his voyage, applied to the secretary of the embassy, Mr Urquhart, for information as to the existence of any restrictions or prohibitions on the part of Russia, and was by Mr Urquhart referred to Lord Ponsonby, who, after informing him that the Russian government had sent him an intimation of restrictions, of a conditional nature, on this trade, explained to him that Russia had no right to impose any restriction whatever, and encouraged him to persevere in his design, assuring him, as

far as his opinion went, of the support of his own government, in case of any interference on the part of the Russian officials.* Such was the *primâ facie* state

* The following memorandum of this interview is extracted from *Urquhart's Progress of Russia in the West, North, and South.* 5th Edition, p. 325.

"*Memorandum of Interview with Lord Ponsonby.*

"On Thursday, the 27th October 1836, I proceeded to Therapia, and having obtained an interview with Lord Ponsonby, I begged of his lordship to inform me if he were aware of any legal impediment existing to prevent my making a mercantile voyage to the coast of Circassia?

"His lordship, in reply, observed, that he had lately received a renewal of the previous intimation given by the Russian government as to trade with that coast being interdicted, except upon certain conditions. But that as he considered that the Russian government had no right whatever to prescribe rules for that trade, he had not complied with the request of the *Chargé d'Affaires* to have such notice intimated to our consul at Constantinople, but had sent a copy of the intimation to the Foreign Office in London, from which he had not received any communication on the subject.

"I then informed his lordship that it was my intention to proceed in a vessel I expected daily to a certain point on the coast of Circassia, which I had fixed upon as most eligible for the trade I had in view; and that as I had ascertained, before leaving London, that our government did not then acknowledge any right on the part of Russia to impede trade with the country in question, and as nothing seemed to have since occurred to change the position of affairs, I should endeavour to attain the object I had in view, and should not be diverted from it unless force were employed on the part of the Russian government, and hoped to obtain his lordship's aid in so doing.

"In reply to this, his lordship stated that he perfectly coincided in the propriety of the plan I had adopted, to which he had no objection whatever to offer, as he considered it an indisputable point that

of the case. Lord Palmerston clearly did not, as the ambassador did, encourage Mr Bell to prosecute his voyage; but *the Gazette*, to which he referred, offered no dissuasives, either in the shape of notified blockade, fiscal restriction, or quarantine regulation; and it is probable that, aware of the interest which the King had taken in the matter, the foreign office had hoped that the Russian authorities would pass by this particular instance, and take some steps to warn others against repeating the experiment. If this were so, the foreign minister had not sufficiently known the relentless foe with whom he had to deal.

Russia had no right to interfere with or to prescribe rules for British trade to Circassia; and that, if I adhered to the straightforward course I had detailed to him, he had no doubt of my being enabled to establish a claim for support from the British government, in which he should be glad to render me all the assistance in his power; requesting me, at the same time, to transmit him information as to what success attended my enterprise.

(Signed) JAMES S. BELL."

(Copy.)

"PERA, *November* 2, 1836.

"SIR,—In consequence of your having referred me to Lord Ponsonby for information respecting any legal impediment that might exist to prevent my projected trading voyage to Circassia, I proceeded to Therapia on Thursday last, and obtained an interview with his lordship.

"I now send you, according to your request, the enclosed copy of the memorandum I took of the conversation that passed between his lordship and myself, a copy of which I have transmitted to his lordship also for his approval.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant, (Signed) JAMES S. BELL.

"DAVID URQUHART, Esq."

That every circumstance under which the Vixen sailed was known to Russia is no matter for doubt. Her system of espionage is too perfect to admit of that; and no concealment was attempted, thus far, that the intention was to raise the question of Russia's right to stop British commerce at this point. But Russia, faithful to her system of taking advantage, to the utmost possibility, of the difficulties of other nations, was at this period too well aware of the obstacles in the way of a British minister, where the alternative might be a hostile one, not to act in accordance with the full extent of that knowledge. Russia, in short, knew that at this very juncture Great Britain was agitated from end to end; that the farming and trading classes were depressed and complaining; that the new poor-law was rousing the masses into resistance and disaffection; and, lastly, that the Bank-directors, terrified by the effects of the monetary measures of President Jackson, were restricting discounts and narrowing their circulation, to retain in their coffers the few millions of specie or bullion that still remained there; and aware from these circumstances that the slightest hostile alarm must be unanimously deprecated by the interest most to be consulted at so critical a time, Russia resolved to push her advantage to the utmost, and lower England in the eyes of the nations. The result was that, when off the port of Soudjouk Kalè, on the coast of Circassia, the Vixen was captured close to the land by a Russian cruiser, Mr Bell and a portion of the crew escaping in the boat on shore, where they were kindly treated by

the Circassians. The seizure was stated by Admiral Lazareff to be on account of a "breach of blockade;" and upon this ground (so stated to Mr Childs, the British consul) the Vixen and her cargo were condemned by the Russian authorities, and confiscated as lawful prize without ceremony or delay.

This daring outrage was brought under the notice of the House of Commons on the 17th March, by Mr John Arthur Roebuck, after a sort for which the term "ill-judged" is too lenient. Instead of keeping to the point of real and pressing interest, the member for Bath mixed with it cases of an older date; and not content with thus confusing the House, destroyed its sympathy by enunciating doctrines as to international law—extraordinary from any mouth, but most of all from that of a lawyer, and this without the slightest necessity or possible use. Mr Roebuck's motion was for a set of miscellaneous papers, some relative to the Danube, some to the shores of the Black Sea, and some to the Vixen. This suited the foreign minister exactly. It put it into his power to make a long reply which dwelt altogether upon irrelevant matter without touching a single point of consequence to the real question, the confiscation of the British ship. Lord Palmerston, in fact, totally avoided clearing up any circumstance material to the question at issue; he did not assert that Circassia was *de facto* at war with Russia; he did not assert that Soudjouk Kalè was a Russian possession; he avoided saying whether the ostensible ground of condemnation was breach of blockade, or municipal law, or quarantine,

or sanitary precaution of any sort. He, however, refused the papers asked—one set on the ground that the events were over, the other on the ground that the event was still in suspense. Of the opinions of the law-officers of the crown he did not say one word. In short, he made the use of speech attributed to it by Talleyrand, to conceal his thoughts.

The debate lingered for a time, every one expecting some declaration from Sir Robert Peel, whose line of conduct as to the Russo-Dutch loan had been so apparently candid. Not being a minister of the crown, it was expected that he would have marked the urgency of the situation, which he could have done without committing the existing ministry or the House to anything specific. To the wonder and sorrow of many, however, Sir Robert suffered the debate to end without a word of comment: thus silently acquiescing in that which was now seen to be intended to end in submission to outrage. That this mistaken and coward course on the part of the leader of the Conservative opposition in the Commons produced effects most pernicious on the Russian mind is quite unquestionable. It could not be explained away.

On the 8th December in the same year, after the death of King William IV., the affair was again introduced by Mr Attwood, the member for Birmingham, but Sir Robert's line of conduct was the same.* That the tame

* In this speech Mr Attwood alluded to a current suspicion that "Russian gold had found its way into that House." If so, it must have been well distributed; for a majority of the 658 were, on this occasion, parties to the cowardice or treachery of the foreign minister.

evasion of the British cabinet was used by Russia, as such transactions are always used by an enemy, there is not wanting evidence to show. In the meantime, it gave the British minister time to induce Russia to change her ground, and assign such a reason for the capture as might be accepted without glaring disgrace. Soudjouk Kalè was acknowledged to be "a Russian possession in virtue of the treaty of Adrianople," and the capture of the *Vixen* finally attributed to a violation of some municipal regulation, which, though not known in England, Russia was justified in making.*

When at length, laying before the House the papers embodying this disastrous termination, Lord Palmerston refused to communicate to the House the opinions of the legal officers of the crown, which, however, were known to be adverse to the pretensions of the Russians on all and every one of the grounds taken, and as no one now denies that Russia, beyond the possession of two or three forts, was never able to penetrate into Circassia, the humiliating pass to which on this occasion the British ministry was reduced may be fully appreciated. That Sir Robert Peel, in adopting the course which he unexpectedly took, was deeply impressed by the monetary difficulties and impending financial risks of the period, is highly probable, if not certain. Few men could better appreciate those difficulties than himself; and the abortive attempt which

* "The justificatory reasons, according to Lord Palmerston, are, first, the receiving on board a cargo not allowed to be imported at all; second, an attempt to trade at a *Russian port* where there is no custom-house."—*Urquhart's Progress of Russia in the West, North, and South.* Fifth Edition, p. 320.

he afterwards made to obviate the chances of such situations for the future was probably prompted by the recollection of the disastrous times which now commenced.

In this fruitless fashion the session "dragged its slow length along," the Peers checkmating without remorse every proposal of the ministry in the shape of legislation, either by direct negatives or by amendments which they knew to be inadmissible, or by delays after delays. In the meantime the violent agitation, especially in the north of England, caused by the obnoxious poor-law act, was day by day stripping the administration of the little respect that was left them. At Bradford, blood was shed by the military in an attempt to force the measure upon an unwilling community; and in due time, a petition describing the whole scene, presented by Mr Fielden, one of the members for Oldham, to the House of Commons, was in vain attempted to be stifled by the Economists, who became frantic at the exposures of the consequences of their measure which every week now produced. The belief, in short, became universal that the ministers could not now hold their ground much longer; and had the Conservatives been as united as they ought to have been upon this and some other questions, they must now have come into power, by no means enviable under the circumstances of the country, distracted by growing commercial distress and popular agitation at home, and by rebellion in the colonies.

An event, however, was now to happen which changed this portion of the national prospects. On the 20th of June, the King, who by those near him had been seen for some months to be rapidly declin-

ing, sunk after an illness of about six weeks, during which all hopes of his rallying, even for a brief period, were at an end. Without any of those qualities that generally attract popular admiration, few kings have died more universally regretted than William IV. His English predilections, his kindness of heart, and the simple, yielding easiness of his disposition, won for him a regard which sterner abilities sometimes miss; and men seemed agreed to pass lightly over his failings, whilst they made the most of his homely virtues. The feelings which dictated this conduct were honourable both to the monarch and to his people; and it was soon seen that the latter were prepared to receive with the same kindliness of loyalty his youthful successor.

It was from the first anticipated that the accession of the youthful Queen Victoria must act as a respite for the party in power. This was naturally to be expected. Too young to have formed any opinions of her own upon the subject, it was known that the Queen had been educated by her sole remaining parent, the Duchess of Kent, in those principles generally designated as "liberal," and had learned that it was the duty as well as policy of a ruler to ameliorate national institutions in accordance with the progress of knowledge and spread of intelligence, and to extend amongst a people the practice of self-government, as by precept and example they became fitted to exercise it. Nurtured in these principles, it was to be expected of course that the young sovereign should be unwilling to see the reins of power taken from the hands of a party whom she must consider fittest to be trusted with them. It was impossible

that she should know how much that party had sunk in the estimation of the country during their short tenure of power; and had she even discovered that they were willing to rule by royal favour in default of popular support, it was not likely that she should deeply disapprove of such compliance. The new reign now commencing was therefore held by most to be equivalent to a lengthened lease of power to the liberal party, and in all probability they themselves so viewed it. A short time was, however, sufficient to dissipate these visions, if they were indeed indulged, and to prove that the popularity of the youthful Queen was not shared by her ministers.

In accordance with established usage, the session of parliament was brought, as soon as possible, to an end, in order that the election of a new parliament should, as usual, signalize the beginning of a new reign. Parliament was dissolved on the 17th of July, and was immediately followed by a general election; in the course of which ministers demonstrated their somewhat unscrupulous willingness to identify their young and royal mistress with their own political party. General elections are never suffered to take place without the adoption, by the friends of the government for the time being, of some "election" or "party cry." The "cry," on this occasion, was "the Queen and Reform;" for the adoption of which the motive was obvious. It assumed that the personal predilections of her Majesty were in favour of the possession of power by a reforming ministry, or one at least which should have no objection to that title; and by this assumption it was hoped ministers might gain

strength. In this they were, however, totally disappointed. In the popularity of the youthful sovereign they took no share; and the election ended without giving them any appreciable accession of strength; whilst, goaded by the agitation arising out of the poor-law, popular opposition out of doors became infinitely more determined and more general.

The new parliament, elected in the first year of the reign of Queen Victoria, met on the 17th November 1837. It was soon found that the balance of parties was nearly the same as in the former House of Commons; nor were the proceedings different in character. The most interesting business of the session related to Lower Canada, where the French population, aided by the more active and violent of the discontented amongst the British Canadians, had been seduced into an abortive rebellion. In this state of affairs, the ministry had, towards the close of 1836, resolved upon sending out the Earl of Durham, with full powers to pacify the insurgent province, and to advise such ulterior measures of colonial government as might preclude similar outbreaks in future. In some respects this choice was unfortunate. The earl was a man of very considerable talent and undoubted sincerity of purpose; but his temperament involved a nervous irritability that sometimes obscured his better judgment and distorted the more amiable features of his character; and besides this, he was, on account of his share in the reform-bill, peculiarly obnoxious to the Conservatives in both Houses, who attributed, and no doubt rightly, to his influence

those portions of the measure which they deemed most dangerous. Hence, his proceedings were sure to be viewed by the Opposition in both Houses with eyes somewhat jaundiced; and as the ministry were in a minority in the Upper House, and scarcely possessed of a majority in the Commons, this opposition, personally directed against the earl, fell with full force upon his friends, through whom alone he could be reached.

The consequences of this unfortunate position of parties were soon apparent. Lord Durham, or rather his legal advisers, had committed, whilst settling the province, an unlucky technical error, which, as all such mistakes do, injured him beyond the reason of the case. He had found it requisite, in the exercise of his authority, to free the province from certain turbulent characters who had been active in the attempt at an insurrection; and to effect this object he had inconsiderately banished them to Bermuda, which, as it happened, was beyond the geographical limit of his jurisdiction. Practically, the blunder was of no consequence, as the exiles, though they could not be kept at Bermuda by Lord Durham's ordinance, could not return to Canada. The mistake, however, afforded too good an opportunity for opposition to be neglected; and such a storm was raised with regard to the illegality of the ordinance that the ministers succumbed and disallowed the act of their viceroy, who, indignant at such treatment, immediately resigned his office and sailed for England. This unlucky mischance still further weakened the administration, as to whose treatment of the Earl of Durham there

was much difference of opinion. In fact it now became manifest that Sir Robert Peel could, almost at will, stop the wheels of government, and that no measure which he resolved strenuously to resist could be carried. It had become absolutely necessary to pass a bill having for its object the pacification of the disturbed province of Lower Canada; but it soon became manifest that this could only be done by adopting the recommendations of Sir Robert Peel as to its preamble and provisions. In the opposition to it the extreme party in the House of Commons were as active as were the Conservative opponents of ministers. Attributing as they did the whole state of feeling in Lower Canada to the misconduct of the governing powers, they very undisguisedly sympathized with the insurgents, in their resistance to that which was openly styled "the baleful domination of the mother country," and the bill only became law by the government submitting to the guidance of Sir Robert Peel, who seemed to divide the governing power almost equally between himself and Lord Melbourne.

Whilst the government was thus all debility within, the nation was torn with an agitation that seemed to grow stronger every day. The lower classes had been totally alienated by the revelation of the theories of those who, by means of the amended poor-law bill, intended to treat poverty as a crime, and to render the rights of property identical with the right to exterminate those who had no property. A portion of the middle classes sympathized with the lower on this subject; whilst another portion, seeing that the

Whig party were determined that no real change of system should be consequent upon the reform-act, joined in the popular resistance which was now, hour by hour, undermining the strength of the ministry and advancing the hopes of the Tory party, who saw power almost within their grasp.

From this junction accidentally arose the movement which was styled "chartism," from a document originating about this time which, by some chance, obtained the title of "the people's charter." It consisted merely of an enumeration of certain points for which a struggle was to be made, none of them new; and was signed, with various reservations, by a considerable number of members of parliament and other influential persons, who now thoroughly saw through the character of the administration.* The agitation, to which this document was the means of giving the name of "chartist," went on until checked by the unfortunate affray at Newport, in Monmouthshire, after which it was in some degree superseded by the more practicable and successful struggle to repeal the corn-laws, conducted under different auspices, and by a more influential portion of society.

* The following extract from a petition agreed to by an immense assemblage of persons, presided over by Thomas Attwood, Esq., M.P., at Holloway Head, near Birmingham, indicates these points:—

"6th August 1838.

"May it therefore please your Honourable House to use your utmost endeavours, by all constitutional means, to have a law passed, granting to every male of lawful age, sane mind, and unconvicted of any crime, the right of voting for members of parliament; and directing all future elections for members of parliament to be in the

The session of parliament, for the dark and disastrous year of 1839, was opened by her Majesty, in person, on the 6th February. At home it found every thing in disquietude and disorder; and abroad it had to deal with the machinations of secret enemies, who, under a thin and almost transparent veil of amity, were encouraging aggressions against the power and honour of Great Britain. The chartist agitation had in fact pervaded the whole country; a convention of delegates from various districts was sitting in London concerting measures for impressing the justice and universality of their claims upon the legislature; and amongst other means a petition had been prepared, to which were attached the signatures of upwards of a million of persons, which was presented ultimately to the House of Commons by Mr Thomas Attwood, one of the members for Birmingham. This torrent of opposition the ministry, who were sufficiently tolerant of strong expressions when employed in their favour, endeavoured to check by means of prosecutions for sedition and libel, in some of which they were success-

way of secret ballot; ordaining that the duration of parliaments so chosen shall, in no case, exceed one year; abolishing all property qualifications in the members; and providing for their due remuneration whilst in attendance on their parliamentary duties." Of these, there seems to be no reasonable doubt that the first, third, fourth, and fifth, had been, at one period or another, the English practice. It is often supposed, however, that the inclination for voting by ballot in England is of modern growth. This is not the fact. It is one of the proposals in the "Oceana" of that very remarkable but now forgotten writer, James Harrington, who was born in 1611, and wrote under the Commonwealth.

ful; but these prosecutions for crimes which hardly admit of intelligible definition, and which, from their very uncertain nature, may be at one time encouraged and at another discountenanced at the pleasure of those in power, only added to the bitter feelings of disgust and hatred under which the ministerialists were sinking, and from the debilitating effects of which the Whig party have never recovered.

Abroad the interests of Great Britain were in a critical position, in both hemispheres. By the inhabitants of that portion of the United States which borders upon Canada the Canadian revolters were openly aided and encouraged, despite of all the efforts of the central government to prevent it; and out of the destruction of the American steam-boat Caroline, ulterior transactions arose, so dishonourable to the country submitting to them that they ought to have been resisted at any price, and at whatever risk. In Asia the state of affairs was equally unpleasant. Disguising her intrigues under the cloak of friendship, Russia was secretly sending emissaries into Candahar, the Punjaub, and Affghanistan, to combine their warlike tribes against British India; and of these dark machinations the Indian government was advertised. The English government, however, as the Czar well knew, was in no position properly to meet these treacherous aggressions. In Ireland, indeed, by conciliating Mr O'Connell and his principal followers, they had brought about a hollow show of quietude; but in Great Britain their unpopularity was at its height; and the majority of the nation now seemed to be resolved that,

if they were to have a government founded upon resistance to popular measures, that government should be conservative, at all events, in name as well as act.

There was, however, another element of weakness of a more perilous character, well known both at Washington and St Petersburg; and this was the critical situation of the Bank, and of the vast system of paper-credit, depending on that bank and its directors. It has been already recorded that the monetary measures of President Jackson had, both directly and indirectly, been the cause of an extensive export of the precious metals, especially of gold, from this country to the United States. This, together with the crisis in the American trade, had alarmed the bank-directors into a withdrawal of their issues and the infliction of a consequent pressure upon all markets. To this cause of danger was now added another, which ultimately brought the Bank into circumstances more trying than any the directors had yet experienced, narrow as was their escape from the panic of 1825-6. The harvest of 1838 was a failure; and the rise of prices in all the markets for grain and pulse, consequent upon this, was now stimulating an importation of corn, the ulterior effects of which threatened to be the deprival of the Bank of every sovereign or ounce of gold bullion in her coffers. The balance which could not be paid in exported goods must be paid in gold or silver; the reserves of the Bank were already too low; and all persons conversant with the phenomena of currency foresaw that, before the year was ended, a monetary storm was certain to burst over Great

Britain, from which it was difficult to say who might escape.

The existence of these complicated difficulties was well known and their effects appreciated by the astute cabinets of Washington and of St Petersburg; and the Muscovite, as usual, made the most of an opportunity so tempting for daring or insidious aggression, or for both. The emissaries of the Czar had, by various representations, amongst which the disgraceful affair of the Vixen conspicuously figured, at length sapped and destroyed British influence at the court of the Shah of Persia, where it once predominated. The English envoy, Mr now Sir John M'Neill, was through their intrigues subjected to the most insulting treatment, until his residence at Teheran became not only intolerable to himself but useless to his country. The Shah had now openly become the vassal and tool of Russia; and from Persia the Russian emissaries had penetrated to Candahar, Cabul, and the country of the Five Rivers or Punjaub, now under the sway of the celebrated Runjeet Singh, one of the most energetic, talented, and powerful of Indian potentates. Luckily, at this dangerous crisis, there had sprung up a feud between Runjeet, the ruler of the Punjaub, and the Dost, Mohammed, who held the sceptre of Cabul. This incident perhaps saved British India; for it seems too probable that, had concert been then possible between the Sikh ruler Runjeet, and the Affghan Dost, Mohammed, the peril must have been great indeed. They were now, however, jealous and bitter foes; and of this the

government at Calcutta, aware of the progress Russia was making, took immediate advantage. There was not, indeed, any time to be lost. The only barrier betwixt Persia and Candahar was the principality of Herat, a city and territory of no great extent, and tributary to the kings of Persia. The prince of this domain was, however, an unwilling vassal, and would have been glad to escape the power of the Shah, to whom he only rendered tribute when the other was in a condition to extort it.

This position soon brought affairs to a crisis between the Shah and his tributary, which Russian interference on one hand, and British interference on the other, accelerated. The troops of the Shah, assisted by Russian engineers, were feebly besieging the fortified city of Herat, which the Prince, Kamran, was successfully defending; inspirited by promises of aid from Calcutta, and assisted by the skill and bravery of Lieutenant Pottinger, a British artillery officer, who, with a few Englishmen, had luckily been able, in time, to reach the place. At this critical moment, the Indian Government, driven by necessity and alarm to immediate action, concluded a treaty with Runjeet, whose army, officered by French generals, was known to be in a state of high discipline and ready for action; and determined to supersede the Dost Mohammed, and to place upon the throne of Affghanistan a ruler of their own, the Shah Soojah, who was to be supported by a British force stationed at Cabul. By this operation, it was hoped that Runjeet and his Sikhs would be finally conciliated, and by

this junction of the forces of the Punjaub with the Affghans, the western frontier of British India rendered secure, until England's financial position at home should be improved sufficiently to enable her to resist more directly and effectually the aggressions of a pretended friend and perfidious ally. For this purpose an army was despatched to occupy Cabul, and dethrone the Dost Mohammed; and every effort was made to encourage the forces of Kamran to defend the fortress of Herat, which commands the most easy road to India from Persia, to the utmost extremity against the assaults of the Shah.

Such were the difficulties which environed the ministry when they met parliament, in the session of the memorable and critical year 1839, which was universally expected, and with reason, to be their last. Besides the difficulties already recapitulated, there were others of no ordinary nature to be surmounted. The opposition to the restrictive system, as applied to grain and other articles of necessary food, gained more or less of power every year; and motions for the abolition of the laws restraining the import of grain were to be resisted both in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Amongst the colonial difficulties and embarrassments, the state of Jamaica also demanded attention. Upon this splendid colony the total abolition of negro slavery had, as might be expected, acted very unfortunately. The colony had been subjected to extreme treatment in two opposite ways, and of two contrary sorts; and it seemed now to be sinking under the system of quackery to which

it had been submitted. The virtual monopoly of the home-market of Great Britain, under which it had been reared, had produced effects the most pernicious upon the industry and enterprise of the planters. Enormous profits do not stimulate improvements; and under this artificial and self-destructive plan, all progress was benumbed, and antiquated processes of cultivation and manufacture continued to be adhered to, which a timely competition would have long before swept away. Thus, when the change was made from forced to free labour, at short warning, and it was found the negroes would not work except for wages extravagantly high, even a virtual monopoly failed to protect the Jamaica planter; differential duties, impolitic always, now became inoperative, and the plantations of this fine island, once a mine of wealth to those who possessed it, became suddenly valueless, or all but valueless. Smarting under the exasperated feelings created by all this ruin, the colonial assemblies in a manner abjured their functions. They refused to vote supplies; and the salaries of public functionaries remained unpaid, and their duties in a state of virtual abeyance. Something was, therefore, now to be done to cure this state of chronic or quiescent anarchy, under which no society could long exist. Before, however, any bill could be brought in, the corn-law question was pressed upon both Houses, and the endless discussions of Irish troubles and Irish remedies were renewed.

On the 19th of February, Mr Villiers, who, in the House of Commons, was the organ of the nascent

Anti Corn-law League, moved that "certain persons be heard at the bar of the House by their agents, witnesses, or counsel, in support of the allegations of the petition, presented to the House on the 13th instant, complaining of the operation of the Corn-laws." The motion of Mr Villiers was opposed by various speakers on both sides of the House—by Lord Howick, by Mr Cayley, by Mr Heathcote, by Lord John Russell, who, however, would consent to "a Select Committee" on the question; and lastly, at great length, by Sir Robert Peel.

Sir Robert took the plain ground, that the taxation of the country, immense compared with that of most other countries, and necessarily raised, for the most part, by taxes on commodities in ordinary use, enhanced enormously the expenses of cultivation; that this rendered a high price of grain necessary; for supposing grain to be reduced by competition with thinly peopled and untaxed countries, to the level of the average of the Continent, one of two consequences must ultimately follow—either rents must be reduced to a mere trifle and the owners of land generally ruined, or two-thirds to three-fourths of the taxes thrown off, in order to save the landed interest, which could, of course, only be done by reducing to nothing the interest paid to the fund-holders; either of which consequences would be equivalent to revolution. Sir Robert denied, unquestionably with perfect truth, that the *depression* then weighing upon trade and manufactures could be traced to the operation of the corn-law. It was, indeed, evident that it arose from

the check given to speculation by the measures of President Jackson, and to the operations of the Bank of England, partly caused by the effects of those measures, and partly by the failure of the crop of grain of 1838. The allegation, that the *extension* of our export trade was barred by the refusal to take, in exchange, the raw produce of nations who could only thus become our customers, was more difficult to meet; and it was not met, either by Sir Robert or by any other speaker. The right honourable baronet attempted to reply, by denying the possibility of our preventing other nations manufacturing for themselves, or extending the British export trade much further—a position hitherto contradicted by all experience. The motion of Mr Villiers was negatived by 361 against 172, giving a majority of 189 against Mr Villiers; so hopeless, at that time, seemed the question of repeal of these laws.

A division very different from this, however, awaited the ministers at no distant period, but not until they had fought their way through the party-strife which constantly lurks, to take hideous shape from time to time, amid the distractions of Ireland, and through another five nights' debate on Mr Villiers' motion (12th March) for a Committee of the whole House on the corn-laws, which was negatived by 342 against 195—majority, 147.* On the 9th of April,

* Sir Robert Peel's address on this occasion, powerful in many respects, is injured by the stress laid on the Windsor tables of prices of grain, and on the prices quoted, and often paid, at foreign ports. The Windsor tables are far above the average of the country, to which Mr Tooke's returns, compiled from those at Mark Lane, come

Mr Labouchere asked leave to bring in a bill for the suspension of the constitution of Jamaica; the reason given being the continued contumacious conduct of the Jamaica House of Assembly, who had so far suspended the constitution already, as to refuse all supplies, excepting such as were requisite to pay the public creditors.

Sir Robert Peel did not conceal his intention to oppose this bill. In doing this, he was no doubt aware that the ground he took—an uncommon one with him—namely, the despotic and tyrannical character of the bill—would afford peculiar advantages, inasmuch as it would secure for him the aid of the extreme liberal party. The Jamaica House of Assembly had, in some of their state papers, said some things as to the acts of the British legislature and the consequences of these acts, which must have cut to the quick all, of whatever party, who acquiesced in these measures. Of this Sir Robert, adroitly enough, took advantage; and described the proposed enactment as one actuated by vexed feeling rather than calm policy, and one which, in their cooler moments, its proposers would regret. The course taken on this occasion by the leader of the Opposition, was to allow the bill to be read a second time,

nearest. The most correct returns are, however, beyond the true average of the country, being taken only at the larger towns, and often falsified by the farmer giving over-measure to guarantee a certain weight. They who know the *arcana* of the corn-trade, know that the prices quoted at the shipping-ports do not at all indicate the *minimum* which, under changed circumstances, the foreigner may and will accept for his surplus grain.

as all admitted the necessity of some stringent measure being adopted; but to oppose its going into committee, as a proposition which no modification could render an eligible one. The closing debate, therefore, took place on the 3d of May, when Lord John Russell moved the House to resolve itself into a committee on the bill. This motion Sir Robert Peel immediately rose to oppose, which he did in one of those spirited and artfully reasoned argumentative speeches for which he was so remarkable. He regretted, he said, that some compromise had not been made with the Jamaica House of Assembly, which might have precluded the necessity of a bill like the present, which nothing but the most extreme circumstances could have justified, if it were justifiable at all. What was the object of the bill? Nothing short of an entire abrogation, for a time, of the constitution and liberties of Jamaica; whose four hundred thousand white inhabitants were to be ruled by a despotic governor and council, responsible only to the government at home, to whom, amongst other inordinate and enormous powers, was to be given the power of taxing this community to an extent which could hardly in one year fall short of half a million sterling! Could no measure of efficiency be found, short of such powers as these, to be exercised over a community accustomed to self-government, and with all the feelings of the population now constituting the United States of North America? Sir Robert Peel then proceeded to contrast the language of ministers as to the Assembly of Jamaica, used some short time before, and

their language on this occasion;—the compliments paid the Assembly by the governor quite recently, with the tyrannical nature of the enactment now proposed: adding, "Why, the preamble of the bill ought to run thus; 'Whereas compliments have been paid by the governor to the House of Assembly; and whereas those compliments were never intended; and whereas, therefore, they ought not to be pleaded as obstacles to the passing of this bill.' Let them have this inserted, in order that posterity, looking at their compliments and their acts, might say, that never were enactments so inconsistent with—so contradictory to —declarations and assurances!"

Having commented strongly on the effect, upon the Southern States of the United States Republic, which this enactment was sure to have; proving, as it seemed to do, that free institutions and emancipation of the negroes were incompatible, Sir Robert went on to say, that "he did not appear there as the advocate of the Assembly. He would not recede from any of the expressions he had used respecting their conduct. He regretted deeply the most unwise course that they had taken. It would have been infinitely better if they had performed their duties, and cordially co-operated in furtherance of the grand experiment, which the people of this country had a right to see fulfilled. He repeated, he was not the advocate of the Assembly. He blamed their language—he blamed their acts. But still the question was, whether that language and those acts justified the House in suspending the constitution of Jamaica? He foresaw a time might come when

they would wish they had attended to his suggestions. He wished that they should pause; that they should remonstrate; that they should see what could be effected by time, that great assuager of human passions as well as woes,—that, in short, they should give the House of Assembly time to reflect upon their conduct, and to become aware of the impropriety of the course they were pursuing. If they made one overture for adjustment and failed, he would promise them his cordial support to carry any measure then required by the exigence of the case."

After contrasting the strange position in which the House would stand if it now called upon the Lords to assist them to stifle the privileges of a popular assembly, after having, on the 22d of April, resisted an inquiry, instituted by the Peers, into the conduct of the Irish government as a breach of their own privileges, Sir Robert thus concluded: "Is the House, I ask, prepared to take this course? If it is, it will place itself in a most strange position, which may end in placing some of its own dearest privileges in jeopardy. And let me say, that if you are prone to take amiss all intemperance—every violent expression—every act of indiscretion in a popular Assembly;—if you have no fraternal sympathy with other representative bodies;—if you are ready to pluck out the mote that is in your brother's eye, heedless of the beam that is in your own;—I still will hope that the example which you are about to set may never, under any future circumstances, be pleaded in derogation of your own privileges, and that you may yourselves escape a fate which

would not be unjust;—for remember with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete shall it be measured to you again!"

Sir Robert's resistance to the ministerial bill was successful. Many of the extreme liberals, who could not object to the ground taken by the Conservative leader, voted with him; and, on a division, the ayes were 294, the noes 289, leaving the ministry the mere nominal majority of five votes. For the moment this was decisive. Unable to face the situation, and shrinking from the appearance of clinging to power under such circumstances, the members of the government tendered their resignations; and, in the opinion of all, and to the satisfaction of most, Sir Robert Peel was once more minister.

CHAPTER VI.

Indifference of the Country—Sir Robert Peel unexpectedly fails to form an Administration—Causes—Correspondence with the Queen—The Melbourne Cabinet replaced—Privilege Question—Stockdale's Suit against Hansard for Libel—Vacillation of the Commons—Sir Robert Peel urges Resistance—Effects of the Poor-law on the Revenue—Great Imports of Grain—Mr Thomas Attwood predicts a coming Panic—Five per cent. added to the Taxes—Critical Position of the Bank—The Directors ask Aid of the Bank of France—Obtain Two and a half Millions Sterling—Great Pressure—The Crisis passes—The Queen's Marriage—Sir John Yarde Buller's Motion—Conduct of Sir Robert Peel—Privilege Question renewed—Sir Robert Peel ultimately supports Lord John Russell—Act to legalize Publications by the Houses—Alarming Deficit in the Revenue—Poor-law Exposures—Great Difficulties of the Ministry—Corn-law Agitation resisted by Ministers—Lord Melbourne's Opinions—Session of 1841—A fixed Duty on Grain proposed by Government—Dissolution of Parliament—Elections adverse—Weakness of Ministers—Sir Robert Peel opposes a fixed Duty—Obtains a large Majority—Ministers resign a second Time.

THE resignation of the liberal ministry was viewed with entire indifference by the country at large; and as disappointment when foreseen loses half its sting, even the active adherents of government hardly deplored that which had so long been perceived to be inevitable. The public mind was at once busied in

conjectures as to the probable tendency of Sir Robert Peel's measures;—for from Sir Robert men expected measures of national importance, in one direction or another, and not a mere series of abortive schemes, the success of many of which would involve much more of evil than their failure.

Such was the state of the public mind after the resignation of the Melbourne cabinet had become generally known; when it began, very unexpectedly, to be whispered about that Sir Robert Peel had, contrary to all foregone opinion, met with ill success in his attempt to form a government, and that Lord Melbourne and his colleagues in the late cabinet must probably resume power. To these whispers others were added that difficulties in the highest quarter had occurred; and to these others were superadded that Sir Robert's conduct had been of a nature to create obstacles to his resumption of power, which, with a will less imperious, could not have been called into existence. The public mind could not, upon such a subject, be long kept in suspense. Every one was anxiously awaiting the *dénouement* of some reactionary scheme on the part of the Liberals; when, on the 13th of May, the entire circumstances of this singular affair (to give it no worse epithet) were brought to light, in the course of an explanation to the House of Commons, given by Sir Robert Peel himself. As this event only helped to prolong the existence of the Melbourne administration for little more than a year and a half, its importance is not such as to call for any detailed or circumstantial record. It is sufficient

to say that Sir Robert Peel felt it necessary to the character and stability of his administration not to have in offices near the Queen's person, as are ladies of the bedchamber, female relatives or near connexions of his political rivals. He accordingly proposed to her Majesty, in the event of their not resigning spontaneously, to remove from offices near her person certain ladies of rank, attached by ties of blood relationship or marriage with the Whig party, and to replace them with others who might be agreeable to her Majesty and at the same time free from this objection. On this being mentioned to the youthful Queen, it appeared her Majesty had felt and expressed some dislike to the proposed change; and on Sir Robert Peel persisting in this opinion, her Majesty took such steps as precluded the perseverance of Sir Robert in his political arrangements.*

It appears that in the course taken the Queen was

*The following is the correspondence which passed between her Majesty and Sir Robert Peel upon the occasion :—

"Buckingham Palace, May 10, 1839.

"The Queen having considered the proposal made to her yesterday by Sir Robert Peel, to *remove the Ladies of her Bedchamber*, cannot consent to adopt a course which she conceives to be contrary to usage, and which is *repugnant to her feelings*.

Within two or three hours the right honourable baronet forwarded to the Queen a representation, of which this is a copy :—

"Whitehall, May 10, 1839.

"Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has had the honour of receiving your Majesty's note of this morning. In respectfully submitting to your Majesty's pleasure, and humbly returning into your Majesty's hands the important trust which your Majesty had been graciously pleased to commit to him, Sir Robert

supported by the opinions of her late ministers, which alone invests the transaction with an importance other-

Peel trusts that your Majesty will permit him to state to your Majesty his impression with respect to the circumstances which have led to the termination of his attempt to form an administration for the conduct of your Majesty's service. In the interview with which your Majesty honoured Sir Robert Peel yesterday morning, after he had submitted to your Majesty the names of those whom he proposed to recommend to your Majesty for the principal executive appointments, he mentioned to your Majesty his earnest wish to be enabled, with your Majesty's sanction, so to constitute your Majesty's household that your Majesty's confidential servants might have the advantage of a public demonstration of your Majesty's full support and confidence, and that at the same time, so far as possible, consistently with that demonstration, each individual appointment in the household should be entirely acceptable to your Majesty's personal feelings. On your Majesty's expressing a desire that the Earl of Liverpool should hold an office in the household, Sir Robert Peel requested your Majesty's permission at once to offer to Lord Liverpool the office of Lord Steward, or any other which he might prefer. Sir Robert Peel then observed that he should have every wish to apply a similar principle to the chief appointments which are filled by the ladies of your Majesty's household; upon which your Majesty was pleased to remark that you must reserve the whole of those appointments, and that it was your Majesty's pleasure that the whole should continue as at present, without any change.

"The Duke of Wellington, in the interview to which your Majesty subsequently admitted him, understood also that this was your Majesty's determination, and concurred with Sir Robert Peel in opinion that, considering the great difficulties of the present crisis, and the expediency of making every effort, in the first instance, to conduct the public business of the country with the aid of the present parliament, it was essential to the success of the commission, with which your Majesty had honoured Sir Robert Peel, that he should have that public proof of your Majesty's entire support and confidence which would be afforded by the permission to make some

wise not belonging to it. That a youthful and inexperienced lady, unaware of the truth of the sad maxim that "a crowned head may have many flatterers but no friends," should, at the early age of twenty-four, form relations of intimacy with ladies of rank placed about her person, is neither blamable nor strange. Nor is it to be wondered at that, unacquainted with the weighty and deep considerations connected with even the most insignificant acts of a personage in her exalted position, she should view with dislike, and even resentment, any attempt to break up or weaken such relations. They, however, who seemed to have encouraged these feelings in her Majesty, and the acts consequent thereupon, can hardly be deemed friends of that monarchical principle to which they profess so sincere an attachment. The Melbourne ministry had resigned upon the avowed ground of inability to conduct longer, with advantage, the government of the country; and having done this, they permit themselves

changes in that part of your Majesty's household which your Majesty resolved on maintaining entirely without change.

"Having had the opportunity, through your Majesty's gracious consideration, of reflecting upon this point, he humbly submits to your Majesty that he is reluctantly compelled, by a sense of public duty and the interests of your Majesty's service, to adhere to the opinion which he ventured to express to your Majesty.

"He trusts he may be permitted, at the same time, to express to your Majesty his grateful acknowledgments for the distinction which your Majesty conferred upon him, by requiring his advice and assistance in the attempt to form an administration, and his earnest prayers that whatever arrangements your Majesty may be enabled to make for that purpose, may be most conducive to your Majesty's personal comfort and happiness, and in the promotion of the public welfare."

to be reinstated in power, ostensibly in obedience to the mere personal feelings of a youthful sovereign, which, however natural and even amiable in her who entertained them, ought never to have been permitted to weigh for a moment against the welfare of a great nation. That Sir Robert was right in the position which he took, can hardly admit of a question. His opponents must themselves have felt, during the latter years of the weak and easy tempered William IV., how greatly the difficulties of administration may be augmented by interference, ventured upon by personal friends of the throne, behind that throne; a fact which only renders their conduct in 1829 towards Sir Robert Peel less excusable.

Ministers by this strange procedure having been restored to their places, the rest of the session was occupied in discussing and passing a second bill for governing the island of Jamaica, so modified as to be acquiesced in by Sir Robert Peel in the Commons, and by the Conservative majority in the House of Peers, together with other measures of less moment. Amongst other discussions, much time was spent in considering how to defend the privileges of the House against the assaults of Mr Stockdale, a publisher of no very enviable reputation, who had brought an action for libel against Mr Hansard, printer and publisher for the House of Commons, on account of certain words reflecting upon the character of Mr Stockdale, contained in a report of the committee of the House, published by Messrs Hansard. In this curious matter Sir Robert Peel acted very characteristically;

abandoning pretensions which he had before supported, probably under a secret conviction that they could not be vindicated as heretofore. The sagacity for which the right honourable baronet was remarkable had no doubt taught him, that although the House was, in all past time, the undoubted judge of its own privileges, which it never suffered to be questioned, and although it would in times gone by have committed to prison every party presuming to raise such an action, yet these powers could only be maintained whilst a perfect sympathy existed between the House and the mass of the people, leading them to consider the cause of one as the cause of the other.

Whilst this perfect sympathy existed, the privileges of the House rested upon universal consent, and were of course unassailable. This sympathy was now, however, unhappily no more. Only three days before, the House submitted to have its printer and publisher assessed for damages for selling a report of one of its own committees, Mr Thomas Attwood, one of the members for Birmingham, had presented a petition signed by 1,280,000 persons, complaining that the House did not duly represent the people, and attributing to the unfitness of the House for the fulfilment of its functions the distress which was then pressing with increasing severity upon all the productive classes. Whether the allegations of this petition were true or false, it was evident that, in the vindication of its privileges, the House could not expect popular sympathy; and by the force of universal opinion alone probably could it on this occasion have been supported, in that

vindication of its privileges, of the necessity for which it ought to have been sole judge, and which immemorial usage required at its hands. Nothing could be more erroneous than the *dicta* delivered by the Lord Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench (Denman) on this trial; but the Commons, having once allowed the attorney-general to appear for Messrs Hansard and plead, had in truth given up the whole question, and the charge of the Lord Chief Justice, the verdict of the Court, and assessment of damages, formed only a fitting sequel to such a course.* Although, therefore, Sir Robert

* It will be obvious to those who will submit to the drudgery of wading through the debates and reports of legal proceedings relative to "Stockdale *v.* Hansard," that when the House of Commons consented to let the Attorney-general plead to Stockdale's action, the entire question of privilege was given up. By this step, notwithstanding the argument of Sir John Campbell that judgment *must* go for the Commons House, because the court *could not* decide upon privilege, by this very act of pleading, he allowed that the court *could* so decide; and he ought to have known, that as lawyers always decide by precedent, the court was sure to rule against him. The danger in this case was that, although there were precedents as far back as 1640 of criminatory matter affecting individuals printed by order of the House of Commons, yet a regular sale of reports was a new exercise of the printing privilege; and this novelty lawyers were sure to condemn, if suffered to judge of that which is clearly apart from law. Few who understand the English constitution will deny that the representatives of the people ought to be privileged to do all things that, in their judgment, are necessary to the exercise of their own functions. Of this they alone can judge; and, therefore, no law as to privilege can be laid down, because new circumstances must continually arise to vary its exercise, and precedent here is valueless.

Again it is obvious, that whilst all courts of law (as Lord C. J. Denman admitted) have a right to publish their own proceedings,

Peel was accused of inconsistency for his advice to the House on the 17th June, that advice was perfectly

both directly and indirectly, the House of Commons, which claims to represent national opinion, and is one of the fountains of all law, must have the strongest claim to this privilege of communicating, by means of the press, with the national constituency. The proceedings of courts of law often embody and embrace libels, which, as parts of such proceedings, may be and are published with impunity. For instance, when Mr John Hunt was found guilty of publishing Lord Byron's "Vision of Judgment," it was read in court, and the entire poem was republished by the *Times* newspaper, as part of the proceedings, without any one questioning the legality of such publication. By analogy, the Commons ought to have the privilege of publishing their own reports, which form an essential part of the proceedings of the House, equally important to be made known to those who elect that House. To argue that the House of Commons is not "a court," because it does not examine witnesses on oath, seems to be, in every view, nugatory. The committees of the House are courts as far as the trial of the validity of elections is concerned; and although the Commons have not, at any time, deemed it essential to take evidence on oath, they commit those who equivocate, or refuse to answer interrogatories, and it would be difficult to show *why* they should not administer oaths to witnesses, if an apparent necessity for so doing were to arise. The House administers oaths to its own members, and why not to a witness?

The true theory of the privileges of both the Houses of Parliament seems to be this:—They rest upon public opinion and public sympathy, and are of the nature of a usage, which is justified by its own circumstances. As long as the great majority of the nation sympathize with the two Houses, and most especially with the Commons, public opinion will sustain them in the exercise of any privilege which they assert to be clearly necessary to the full action of their own especial functions as one branch of the legislature. When, however, public opinion deserts them, their privileges are at the mercy of even such a man as Stockdale, because, unaided by national opinion, they dare not risk their assertion as formerly. The Long

judicious. Sir Robert, when the action was first raised, had opposed the weak course then taken of permitting the Attorney-general to plead; and in this he was, in the abstract, though perhaps not under the circumstances, right. That course once taken, however, and the Chief Justice having tried the case, which ended in a verdict for the plaintiff Stockdale, with damages to the amount of £100, it requires no great exertion of common sense to perceive, that to have proceeded, as was proposed, against the sheriff, who acted as the mere servant of the court, would have been more than ridiculous; and in advising the House against this line of conduct, therefore, Sir Robert acted just as judiciously as he did in urging firm resistance, if possible, when the first step was taken by Stockdale.

Parliament would undoubtedly have sent to prison all concerned in Stockdale's suit, not excepting Chief Justice Denman himself, if he permitted such an action to be raised in his court. But this the House of Commons of 1840 dared not risk; and hence they were at length driven by Mr. Stockdale to the humiliation of making the Crown and the Lords judges of the Commons' privileges, by asking their assent to an act legalizing the printing and publication of reports of committees of either House. This was a desertion of the high constitutional ground just as complete as was their suffering the Attorney-general to plead to Stockdale's action in the Court of Queen's Bench; and the time may come when this precedent may be quoted against them, and all privilege resisted and disallowed, unless declared and legalized by an act of the three branches of the legislature conjointly. It has answered the immediate purpose certainly of stopping in the courts of law all such suits as those of "Stockdale *v.* Hansard;" but in order to effect this purpose, it has rendered doubtful and thoroughly disturbed the whole ground on which parliamentary privilege has heretofore rested.

Whilst these discussions were going on, the difficulties of the commercial world, and of course of the reinstated ministry, were rapidly thickening. It had always been urged by those who opposed the Poor-law Amendment Act, that, in its consequences, it would be found as trying to those who acquiesced in it as to the unfortunate poor who might be tortured under it. Its intent was to reduce wages to the lowest level consistent with the existence of the labouring classes; but those who contemplated with joy the saving hence to be derived by the landlord or the manufacturer, forgot that, with the poor, the revenue must also suffer. About a half of the wages of the labourer of every class goes directly to the Exchequer. Reduce those wages, and you reduce the revenue by the same act. This now began to be sensibly felt by the Chancellor of Exchequer. It had been found no doubt impossible to work the Poor-law Amendment Act in accordance with the real wishes of its advocates; but enough had been attempted to add greatly to the privations occasioned by the growing and now alarming pressure on the Bank and money-market, and these combined had now affected the revenue to a serious extent. Of the crisis which was approaching, the cabinet, who appeared to be ignorant of the extent of the danger, were distinctly warned.

On the 30th of May, Mr Thomas Attwood moved a resolution expressive of his opinion that continued imports of grain must, if something was not done to meet the certain effects of that importation upon the Bank, produce in a short time a monetary crisis analogous in its nature and origin to those of the years 1816, 1819,

1825–26, and 1836–37, but probably much more severe. Of the perfect and complete truth of the anticipations of the honourable member for Birmingham, the nation had terrible proof during the following winter. The House, however, refused to listen to Mr Attwood—Sir Robert Peel, who was pointedly alluded to, cautiously declining to reply, and Mr Warburton, instead of replying, contenting himself with accusing of "dishonesty" all who contended against the real dishonesty of the Cash-payments Act of 1819. Under these circumstances the resolution was negatived without a division, and Mr Attwood, hopeless of obtaining attention either to this or any other real evil of which the nation complained, shortly afterwards resigned his seat; whilst the Chancellor of the Exchequer attempted to cure the growing *deficit* in the revenue by the imposition of *five per cent.* additional upon the aggregate taxation of the country—a measure which totally failed, but which sufficiently at the same time demonstrated the total ignorance of the causes actually affecting the revenue which prevailed in the cabinet.

On the 27th August, parliament was prorogued in the midst of difficulties which, within a very short period, were destined to reach a climax truly alarming. By raising the rate of interest from time to time, and discouraging in every practicable way speculations in the market for grain, the Bank directors had vainly hoped to arrest the export of gold, which had become excessive, and restore the foreign exchanges to a healthy state. All these efforts, however, had failed; and towards the month of October, it began to be evident

to all possessing a knowledge of the true position of affairs, that, unless some extraordinary effort was made to meet the exigence, either on the part of the Bank or the government, a crisis must ensue more trying than any that had as yet been experienced. To the government it was useless to apply; and at length, in their extremity, the directors came to the resolution to apply to the Bank of France to save them from a stoppage that now seemed inevitable. Even this last and somewhat questionable resource had nearly failed them. The managers of the Bank of France were both amply able and very willing to interfere to this end, but the rules under which they only could act peremptorily forbade such a transaction. The destruction of the whole system, erected at such a ruinous sacrifice both for the present and the future, seemed now at hand; and many began to predict a repetition, for good or for evil, of the scenes of 1797, when a device for meeting the difficulty was found, and the Bank rescued from the total exhaustion of its metallic reserves. The managers of the Bank of France were induced to consent to discount bills to the amount of two and a half millions drawn by the house of Baring Brothers upon various banking firms in Paris; and the proceeds of these securities were remitted in the shape of bullion to London.

That this operation saved the Bank of England from the risks of a second bank-restriction, is beyond a doubt. What consequences the attempt again to circulate an inconvertible paper might have produced, no man could anticipate. A reflecting mind can hardly help wondering, however, that, averse as

the public mind in England seems to be to give the slightest attention to this momentous subject, an escape so narrow should not have stimulated serious inquiry into a system which, whilst it inflicts upon the nation all the evils of a currency unjustly enhanced in value, leaves it exposed to all the perils of a fluctuating paper credit.*

The session of parliament for 1840, which was opened by her Majesty in person on the 16th of January, was as prolific of words, and as barren of wholesome fruit, as was the session preceding. It opened, indeed, with the pleasant announcement of her Majesty's marriage with Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, but soon degenerated into a

* "That, but for the aid of France, the Bank must have stopped payment, was fully proved by Mr Samuel Loyd, the banker, in a pamphlet published in December 1839. The Bank averages of bullion, for the last four months of the year 1839, standing thus:—

September	£2,816,000
October	2,522,000
November	2,545,000
December	2,887,000

These averages being each upon three months' stock; and the credit of the Bank of France for the amount of two millions and a half sterling, having been all used, it seems to follow, as a matter of calculation, that had it not been for the application of these two and a half millions, one of these must have been '*nil*,' otherwise some one of the four must have shown a higher amount than it does; and hence Mr Loyd is correct in asserting upon these returns (as he most unreservedly did), that 'we are justified in saying that, *without the protection of this peculiar operation*, the bullion of the Bank would have been completely exhausted.'"—*Financial History of England*, p. 323.

series of debates without results, or of measures pared down to such a standard of unmeaningness as the necessities of party and the conciliation of opponents might dictate. Amongst the more prominent topics were another modified municipal bill for Ireland, and a bill for bringing to a termination the perpetual assaults upon their privileges, to which the House of Commons, owing to the necessary weakness of the course taken to resist them, was now constantly exposed. The motion, however, upon which the public attention was most intently fixed, was that of Sir John Yarde Buller, embodying, as it did, the proposal of a vote of want of confidence in ministers.

Upon all these occasions, the conduct of Sir Robert Peel was such as was usual with him—prudent, astute, cautious, and nicely calculated to increase men's confidence in him, whilst it was ebbing away from his opponents. On the privilege-question he acted with his usual sound plain sense, from which no motive was present to draw him aside. He was well aware that, in allowing the Attorney-general to plead in Stockdale's action, the Commons really gave up the entire question. To send Sir John Campbell to tell the court and the jury that they *must* decide against Mr Stockdale, *because* it was "a question of privilege," was worse than absurd, because both judge and jury were sure to decide as they deemed most fit, being once appealed to; and, in the then state of public opinion, all but certain to decide against the House, in asserting what was generally held to be an arbitrary power of publishing libels. This Sir Robert Peel

distinctly felt; and therefore when, in his extremity, Lord John Russell asked leave to introduce a bill to legalize the publication of reports, although this was giving to the Crown and the Peers a claim to judge *in futuro* of the Commons' privileges, and was suffering them to depend upon an act of the legislature, repealable in its own nature, Sir Robert supported the measure as a *dernier ressort*, still retaining his former opinions as to the peculiar nature of the privileges of both Houses.

Sir Robert's reasons for supporting the views of Lord John Russell are best given in his own words—"In assenting to take the course now proposed (said the right honourable baronet), he adhered as strongly as ever to his original opinions upon this subject. He still thought an unlimited power of publication necessary to the proper discharge of the functions of the House. He still was of opinion that the judgment of the Court of Queen's Bench was altogether unwarrantable and irreconcilable with reason, and that it did not at all correspond with the grounds on which it professed to be founded. He had had distinct declarations from his right honourable friend, who had filled the office of Lord-chancellor of Ireland, for whose opinions he had the highest respect, and also from another learned friend for whom he had the same respect, and who was one of the most distinguished ornaments of his profession—he had from these honourable and learned friends a distinct declaration that, in their opinion, the House of Commons possessed the right of publishing its own proceedings. The difficulties, therefore, that had

arisen, were not to be attributed to any extravagant or unfounded pretensions urged by that House, but to the strange judgment pronounced by the court of law. He thought still that the House was bound in duty not to resort to legislation, until it had tried how far the powers which it undoubtedly possessed were sufficient for the vindication of its own privileges. The power of imprisonment for breach of privilege was now established beyond all question or doubt. They had compelled the courts of law to recognise it; and it was one that, being established, he would go on to exercise, did he not expect (as he did) still more effectually to protect, by other means, their right of free publication of their own proceedings. (Hear.) * * * * This power (of imprisonment) he considered incomplete and imperfect; and this imperfection was the sole reason that induced him to assent to a resort to legislation. (Hear! hear! hear!) The powers of the House were undoubtedly very imperfect as regarded *time*. The powers of the House were limited by the duration of the session. The law of custom denied the House the privilege of prolonging imprisonment beyond the duration of the session. This being the law and the usage, then, during the recess their printers might be continually harassed by suits of this sort. Now, the House had resolved not to plead; and it could not, it appeared, rely upon the protection of the courts; and this being so, was it decent or dignified to allow their printers thus to be harassed in the execution of orders given by the House of Commons? Was not this a great

and a monstrous indignity? Was he to be told the House might be adjourned and not prorogued? Why, this was only another indignity. Could there be a greater than that the crown should thus be deprived of the constitutional power of prorogation?"

After some pertinent observations as to the improbability of obtaining advantage by an appeal to the fifteen judges, and the manifest impolicy of risking an adverse judgment, Sir Robert touched the really tender spot of the want of support, out of doors, in public opinion, which was the true cause of the humiliating position in which the House was placed. "Here is a man (said Robert Peel) who could obtain no respect in the circle in which he lived, raised by his conduct and conflict with the House to such an elevation, that his private character and his motives were totally lost sight of or disregarded! He was only esteemed the assertor of a great public principle (!); and he found ranged on his side men who entertained the greatest contempt for his private character, whilst men of the highest honour were seen co-operating with him, and this, night after night. He (Sir Robert Peel) doubted whether the power of imprisonment, as possessed by the House, was as effectual as it was generally considered to be. He doubted whether the exercise of it, in this matter, might not involve them in a series of interminable contests! Let them not rely upon committing the first counsel who appeared against them. Others would come forward, for the spirit of party and the love of distinction were just as strong as the fear of

punishment, especially when that punishment was popularly held to be an unjust sentence. (Hear, hear, hear!)" Sir Robert concluded by stating his determination to support Lord John Russell in the introduction of a bill to legalize, by statute, the printing and sale of reports by the House of Commons. The bill was ultimately passed, and is now a law; but it appears impossible to conclude with Sir Robert Peel that, by this procedure, no detriment to the privileges of the House was sustained.

In fruitless discussions of this description, and in the discussion of motions made for purely party-ends, the greater part of the session was wasted. One, expressive of want of confidence in the administration by Sir John Yarde Buller, on the 25th of January, was, after four nights of very useless debate, negatived only by a majority of twenty-one votes, although every effort was made by the friends of ministers to influence votes in their favour. On this occasion Sir Robert Peel, as a matter of course, voted with the minority. To chronicle further the debates of this abortive and, to ministers, humiliating session would be useless. Suffice it to say that it ended, amid the entire persuasion of all observing politicians, in and out of parliament, that neither court favour, nor the delusions of a mercenary and venal press, could prolong, for many months more, the duration of the now semi-animate ministry. A new ground of distrust was now arising which, added to those already existing, brought sure destruction in its train. In short, the moneyed interest now began to be generally

and seriously alarmed. Until now, that interest had been, as regarded the administration, divided; but it was now all but unanimous. In spite of every effort to conceal the dreaded truth, it was now becoming manifest and notorious that a *deficit* in the revenue was occurring year after year, which now threatened to reach an alarming amount. The total stagnation of trade, and the effect of the inhuman poor-law amendment act in reducing wages, were now making themselves felt at the treasury, under circumstances calculated to startle the most sanguine financier. As long as the owners of capital dare to foster speculation, the receipts of the exchequer cannot be materially diminished, because all speculation involves more or less of payment of indirect taxation. But, at this moment, capital was withdrawing from trade; and the dread of the Union work-houses was compelling men to submit to a general reduction of wages, rather than, by resistance, risk the exposure of themselves and their families to the iniquities there too constantly perpetrated.*

* In the latter part of this year, a great sensation was created by the exposure, at Rochester, of the brutalities of the master of a work-house named Miles. The commission of various acts of the most disgusting and revolting nature was distinctly proved against this wretch, many of which can only be described by saying, that they united a profligate indecency to a studied brutality. The depositions proving the disgraceful facts were numerous and unanswerable; when, to the astonishment of the public, the magistrates, instead of sending the culprit to trial, evaded the case by sending the documents—to whom, reader?—even to the Poor-law Commissioners! (*Par nobile Fratrum!*) See the *Annual Register*, *December* 1840.

The assured consequence of this position of affairs was a growing *deficit* in the revenue, which it was beyond the power of the Whig Chancellor of Exchequer to cure. Of all the many diseases to which states are liable, a deficient revenue, accompanied by heavy taxes and growing indebtedness, is the most perilous in its nature and the most fatal in its consequences. Even the more simple fiscal systems of antiquity were of no avail to exempt nations from convulsion arising out of this cause. Of this truth the measures of Solon afford a proof; and they who study Roman history aright will learn that the subversion of the power of the Senate and the foundation of the imperial system, by Cæsar, were mainly brought about by these causes of revolution. To the same causes must be attributed, for the most part, the greatest political catastrophe that modern times have witnessed; and to the debts caused by the ambition of Louis XIV., and the profligacy of Lous XV., joined to a vicious system of exemption from taxation in favour of the noblesse, may be traced the pitiable fate of the weak but amiable Louis XVI., and of his unfortunate but imprudent queen, Marie Antoinette.*

Under such circumstances, it was not only natural that the moneyed interest, and all who, directly or indirectly, subsisted upon the taxes, should be startled, but

* For an account of the way in which the *deficit* in the French finances was connected with the lamentable fate of the unfortunate queen of Louis XVI., the reader is referred to "Swinburne's Letters," written from Paris in 1789, and during the three following years. Mr Swinburne was attached to the British Embassy.

it behoved also the friends of constitutional monarchy to be upon their guard; knowing, as they must do, that, if any event can endanger the limited monarchy of the English constitution, that event must be a financial *débâcle*. The character of Sir Robert Peel was too deeply imbued with cautious reserve to admit of the expression of his misgivings as to the financial state of the country to their real extent; but that they were serious his subsequent conduct proved; nor can there be a doubt that he saw, throughout the whole of the dismal year of 1840, that he must, at no distant period, be called upon to deal with that state. Nor was this persuasion confined to himself and his immediate friends. Even the partisans of the ministry began to confess that they were unequal to meet the growing difficulties of the country; and that the next session of parliament must be productive of change.

Sir Robert Peel, himself, indeed, took no pains to conceal his exultation over the rapidly growing strength of his party. He openly proclaimed, on one of those festive occasions of which he was fond of making a political use, that a party possessing three hundred united members of parliament could not long be kept away from substantial power, nor for again achieving the predominance of conservative principles. This was indubitably true as far as the human will can be supposed to regulate events; but, beyond that, it was an *ignis fatuus*. Sir Robert forgot that men obtaining power in a country, circumstanced as this then was, cannot be masters of their own course of action. The

Bank had just been reduced to a dilemma which compelled it to reduce its issues to the lowest practicable amount. Capital was withdrawn from trade; nor could any one foresee, at that time, any series of events likely to call it into active operation. Under the joint pressure of the diminished circulation and the suicidal poor-law, wages were being reduced, together with profits; and the joint effect of this double reduction was a deficient revenue. But, with a diminished trade, came a morbidly increasing population. From the time of the American war, which ended in 1783, this morbid rapidity of increase had become visible, and had been observed, after 1819, to become more and more manifest; and now, in 1840, it was known that, in each three years, about a million was added to the population, without any addition to the employment of the country.

Sir Robert forgot that the ruler of a realm so situated, instead of ruling events must be ruled by them, be his political creed what it may. The dilemma was one of actual circumstances and not of parties. Trade was to be stimulated, the exchequer replenished, and employment created for the millions super-adding, or that super-addition to be obviated; or failing this, convulsion loomed in the distance. Such were the prospects of the actual and the possible rulers of the country, at this period, and the events which ensued were such as might be anticipated from such prospects. Yet, as if these prospects were not gloomy enough, the cupidity of the East India Company in China, and the restless meddling of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, in Syria,

had created two foreign embroilments to be added to the domestic embarrassments of government. From these the nation was eventually extricated by the rare energy and skill of its naval and military commanders, backed by the native daring of the men under their command; but that the Queen's government should, in the midst of financial and political difficulties, have suffered themselves to be entangled in hostilities, the consequences of which no one could foresee, gave pause to thinking men; and reflecting minds began to be forced upon the conclusion that, whilst the at once weak and reckless rule of Lord Melbourne lasted, national safety was out of the question.

The session of 1841, which was opened by her Majesty on the 26th January, took place amidst universal persuasion that the ministry would not get through it. The preceding session had been barren of results; and the public now appeared to be fully convinced that the ministry were neither able nor willing to carry through any measure of the slightest value to themselves or to them. The opening of parliament consequently produced less excitement than usual, and the nation patiently awaited a ministerial catastrophe, which everybody believed to be near at hand. All eyes were, in fact, now turned upon Sir Robert Peel; and his return to power within a few months was confidently predicted by the political circles, and by observing men in general. These predictions were safely indulged in by their utterers. Besides the domestic difficulties that beset the ministerial path, foreign affairs were similarly unpromis-

ing. The events of the short war in Syria and the humiliation of Mehemet Ali, the viceroy of Egypt, had deeply wounded the feelings of the French nation, who were left out of the treaty which led to the invasion of Syria and the bombardment of Acre. In Spain, Espartero, backed by British influence and money, was vainly struggling to extinguish the "Fueros" of the brave Basques, to destroy the Spanish Church and conventual system, and to offer up the church-lands as a holocaust to 'Change Alley.

In the United States there was great irritation arising from two distinct causes. During the Canadian rebellion many of the citizens of the States had both covertly and openly assisted the insurgents. In the course of these lawless proceedings, an American steam-boat, the Caroline, engaged in conveying aids to those in insurrection, was set fire to and destroyed by the Canadian militia under Mr M'Leod, a British loyalist officer, after a conflict in which some lives were lost. Under the circumstances, the act of M'Leod was quite justifiable by the law of nations; but soon afterwards falling into the hands of the Americans, so deep was the feeling against him that the authorities actually resorted to the outrageous step of arraigning him under an indictment for murder, though holding the Queen's commission and a British subject. This, however, was not all; for in what was called the question of "the Maine Boundary," there seemed to be involved consequences that appeared fated in the end to cause a rupture between Great Britain and the States. The entire dis-

pute, which arose out of the imperfect nature of the original treaty of peace in 1783, had been, after the peace of 1814, left to the decision of the King of the Netherlands, who undertook it, and gave an award eminently favourable to the State of Maine. The senate of Maine, however, thought otherwise; and, under pretext that the Belgian revolution had altered the position of the King (now only King of Holland) refused to accept the award given; after which step a succession of boundary disputes arose, that perpetually brought into collision the government of the United States and that of Great Britain, threatening the amicable relations of both. To expect that the weak cabinet of Lord Melbourne could successfully struggle against a complication of difficulties like this, would have been infatuation; nor did any one expect it. Every one looked to Sir Robert Peel, who now manifestly meditated some step calculated to overthrow the ministry; and a few months sufficed to make expectation certainty.

The difficulties of a Whig administration had now, in fact, become insuperable. Besides their acknowledged opponents, they had now to deal with two enemies in the guise of friends, whose demands could be no longer evaded, and whose conduct immensely augmented their perils. These were Mr O'Connell and his faction, to whom a cry for repeal of the Union had, at length, become a political necessity; and the agitators for a total repeal of the corn-laws, headed by Mr Villiers in the Commons House, and by Messrs Richard Cobden and John Bright out of it. The de-

mands of both of these factions the ministers had sternly resisted, as long as they were able to resist them. The scheme of repealing the Union Lord Melbourne had characterized as little better than high treason. The idea of totally sweeping away the corn-laws he had treated as bordering on insanity; but with both the ministers were now, to avoid ruin, compelled to temporize. To conciliate Mr O'Connell the government were pressing a registration-bill for Ireland which tended to add to the popular constituencies; and, to take off the pressure of the anti corn-law agitation, it was now current that some great modification of the duties on grain was to be yielded by the cabinet. The time, however, for compromises was now passing away. Mr O'Connell could not evade his repeal-pledges; whilst Mr Villiers still moved for a total repeal of all duty on the importation of grain. And the result was that, without conciliating their dangerous friends, the Whigs still more and more added to the alarm and energy of their Conservative opponents, to whom any farther concessions, in either direction, sounded like revolution.

The first measure of pressing importance that was debated by the House of Commons was the bill for the registration of voters in Ireland, the second reading of which was moved on the 22d February by Lord Morpeth. It was a vital matter with Lord Melbourne's government to obtain a respectable majority for the second reading of this bill. First, because it was bitterly opposed by Sir Robert Peel, who foresaw that, if it could be carried, another serious obstacle to his

government of Ireland would be thus created. In the second place, it behoved the cabinet to strain every nerve on this occasion, because it was a favourite measure with Mr O'Connell and his party; and because their own sincerity in its support was suspected by many. It was notorious that O'Connell's domination sat uneasily upon them. They knew that, under pretext of regulating registration, this measure would, by the mode of rating introduced, add greatly to the popular constituency, and consequently to the power of "the Liberator." They, in common with their Conservative rivals, secretly deemed that power already too great; and hence many persons inferred that, if the bill could be evaded creditably to themselves, Lord Melbourne's friends would be as little sorry as those of Sir Robert Peel. The difficulty really was, however, to obtain a decent majority for the second reading. The open enemies of the administration were sure to muster in force; all who feared and hated Mr O'Connell were sure to find reasons for not supporting the bill; and the feelings of the ministerialists were known to be only lukewarm in the matter.

The end accorded with these antecedents. The debate on the second reading was prolonged over four nights; and on the fourth night, after a strong and artful appeal to the fears as well as the favour of the House by Mr O'Connell, Sir Robert Peel rose to oppose the measure. He did this at great length and on a variety of grounds. He characterized it as a measure every way deficient in good faith, and as being proposed less with a view to passing it than to stop the passing

of the bill proposed by a noble friend (Lord Stanley). It purported to be a mere bill of regulation. In reality it constituted a new reform-bill for Ireland, and would amount in practice, if it could become law, to a resuscitation of the forty-shilling freeholders. This, Sir Robert affirmed, would be the practical effect of a mere rating to the poor at five pounds, as proposed by the bill; and against this he earnestly protested. The old forty-shilling freeholders were, in 1829, given up by the Irish themselves, the honourable and learned gentleman (Mr O'Connell) only making an exception in favour of those who possessed the fee-simple, and were real and not constructive freeholders. After abandoning them in 1829, the honourable and learned member for Dublin ought not now to be party to an attempt furtively to revive them.

Sir Robert then proceeded to expose the inconsistency of a bill which, professing as it did to establish a sound Irish constituency, absolutely left that constituency to be enlarged or diminished by the conduct of the great landholders, whatever that might chance to be. Upon the nature of the leases granted, these votes, Sir Robert argued, must rest; and who could predict what may, or may not, be the course of those who have the power to grant such leases, or to refuse to grant them? Working next upon the apprehensions as well as the pride of the House, Sir Robert referred to the worst threats and ambiguous vaticinations of the member for Dublin, as to the possible consequences of a refusal to pass the bill. He besought the House, if it were just, if it were wise, if it were requisite as a measure, to pass it

because it was necessary, wise, and just; but not from a terror of consequences. He implored honourable members to reflect for one moment whither such a step might lead them. Could they, after such a concession for such a reason in Ireland, refuse to make a similar concession, upon similar grounds, in England or Scotland? Did they expect not to be treated to such grounds? Had there been no demands (Sir Robert inquired) for a popular "charter," backed by a show of physical force? and after yielding to such demands, so enforced in one island, were they prepared to resist them, redoubled as they must be, in the other? Sir Robert concluded with a stinging appeal *ad hominem*, addressed to Lord John Russell, who, flushed with the success of his party, not dreaming of its rapid decline, and unmindful of future necessities, had unwisely, as well as arrogantly, proclaimed the "finality" of the reform-bill.

"The noble lord may purchase (said Sir Robert) by concession on these points a temporary support; but I cannot help thinking, when he recalls to mind the declarations of 1834 and 1837, that it will abate something of the feelings of satisfaction with which he may contemplate this temporary triumph, — something of the satisfaction with which he may reflect on the small majority which he may call to his aid this night; it will, I think, cast a gloom over the festivities with which he may celebrate this new compact,—this fresh alliance,—if the reflection shall come across him that he has gained that support by receding from the position which enabled him to resist the march of democratic invasion; by obstructing the progress of

social amelioration in Ireland, by exciting hopes which he cannot realize, and by raising passions which he cannot disappoint without becoming the object of indignation; which he cannot gratify without becoming the fomentor of convulsion."

The second reading of the bill was carried by a majority of *five*—the ayes being 299; the noes, 294. It was now sufficiently evident that the doom of the ministry could not be much longer averted, and that it was certain; but it was also evident that Lord Melbourne and his colleagues were resolved to die in the last ditch, and, as crows are said to do when mortally wounded, to hang to the tree, bearing fruit so precious, even by a single claw. The debates which followed this ominous division consisted of little else than an endeavour, on the part of the liberal side of the House, to delay the approaching catastrophe to the latest possible moment—

> "They joked with the hangman, and traversed the cart,
> And often took leave—but were loath to depart!"

On the subject of taxes and estimates, the parties, indeed, were unanimous enough; but the rest of the session consisted altogether of a mere party-struggle, by no means creditable to those who thus prolonged it. It was now manifest to the whole country, that government was only capable of doing that which Sir Robert Peel suffered them to do; and to persevere in the semblance of government, under such circumstances, was only adding needless disgrace to inevitable defeat. It was now necessary that ministers should succumb, but to succumb amidst public derision was not necessary. A state of affairs so anoma-

lous as this could not last. The very acts of the administration demonstrated to all discerning men that they had, from the commencement of the session, deemed their position hardly tenable. As a forlorn hope, therefore, they had given notice of a motion to take into consideration the state of the corn-laws; but this was seen by all to be a forlorn hope. No one more anxiously deprecated the systematic agitation now in progress against these laws than did the Premier. But now, when the alternative was either to resign office or resign the sliding scale, and thus conciliate the Economists and the manufacturers who were now in league, the love of power prevailed, and the corn-law was the destined Jonah to be thrown overboard in the last resort. The futility of even this last hope was speedily, however, to be made apparent.

On the 27th of May, Sir Robert Peel dealt a blow which, in effect, was the final one for the Melbourne administration, and almost for the party of which it was the organ, and which took the shape of a resolution, expressive of a want of confidence, on the part of the House, in the government. This resolution was moved by Sir Robert Peel in a speech remarkably calm and dispassionate, considering the certainty of the triumph now in prospect before him, and considering the tumultuous, nay, indecent and breathless haste with which, eleven years before, he had been told to resign his power (as his enemies then fondly hoped) for ever. No abstract can give an idea of this finished address, which was, in fact, a bill of indictment, in which all the misdemeanours and

laches of his adversaries were remorselessly chronicled. In the closing sentences, the venom of the whole is, as it were, concentrated; and they must, in truth, have been worse than gall and wormwood, doubly distilled, to those to whom they were addressed:—

"The noble lord (concluded Sir Robert) was the author of the bill by which this House of Commons was constituted. It was the noble lord who thought it expedient to abolish the system of nomination-boroughs. It was for the noble lord to introduce more of the popular spirit into the constitution of this House—to make it, as he said, correspond more with the progress of popular intelligence and the spread of knowledge. To achieve this, the noble lord thought that we ought to make the House more the express image of public opinion—an assembly more sympathizing with the people—more originating from the people—more expressive of the popular mind. This House of Commons, thus constituted according to the views of the noble lord—this House of Commons had the advantage (if it could be so considered) of being elected under the noble lord's auspices; and whatever benefit there possibly might be from having had its election at the time when her gracious Majesty came to the throne of these kingdoms, that benefit, also, the noble lord possessed. Yet this House of Commons—so constituted, so elected, under the very auspices of the noble lord—this House of Commons it is that has given, I think, sufficient indications that it withholds its confidence from that government, of which the noble lord is so conspicuous a member.

I trust (continued the right honourable baronet) that I have executed this duty in conformity with the spirit with which I intended to execute it—with no mixture of that asperity of party into which I may sometimes have been betrayed, when rising at the close of a debate, to speak under that excitement and agitation that naturally attend that period of our deliberations. It has not been my intention to treat with disrespect those who hold the executive offices of government, but it has been my intention to say to the government, 'It is your duty to the House of Commons—if it have those additional claims to public respect which you ascribe to it—if it embodies more of the public spirit—if it reflects more accurately the image of the popular mind than those that have preceded it—then it is your duty, nay, your peculiar duty, not to deprive it of any of the legitimate influence which it possessed under other circumstances, and which you were the first to recognise and to seek to extend. Of this I am convinced, that if the House of Commons so constituted, had ratified your decrees—had acted in conformity with your suggestions, you would have been the first to bow to its opinions with respect; and now let me tell you that, when the House of Commons sees fit to choose a different course, it is your bounden duty not to reject its decisions with scorn, because they are now unfavourable to your views, and hostile to your continuance in power."

The resolution, thus moved, was carried by a majority of one—the ayes being 312; the noes, 311.

Most persons supposed that the defeat of the Melbourne government was at length achieved; but the public were not aware that imbecility in an administration, like anility in very old persons, often manifests a strange tenacity of life, which seems to grow in the *ratio* of decrepitude, and only dies with life itself. The public, accordingly, soon learned that ministers, driven now to extremities, were resolved to try the forlorn hope of a dissolution of parliament and a general election. This, though not altogether expected, created little surprise; but some wonder followed when, by the ministerial tactics in the Commons, it became apparent that they had no objection, throughout the coming contest, to have attributed to them the character of Corn-law Repealers.

Lord John Russell, although the prorogation of the House was delayed until the requisite supplies could be voted, absolutely refused to have the slightest discussion as to the question of corn-laws, as to which he had given notice of motion. The same cunning backwardness was extended to the poor-law, the commissioners of which were to be renewed or re-appointed. The policy of this was patent enough. The public were left to draw almost any conclusion they chose as to the intentions of the Whig party with respect to the restrictions on the import of grain, excepting that they wished a fixed duty of about 8s. per quarter for wheat; so that if, by representing them as (at heart) total repealers, an election might be gained, a loop-hole was left through which to insinuate such a representation. As to the poor-law, they well knew that

the very mention of a continuation of the three commissioners was abhorrent to all who respected either the laws of humanity or the laws of their country; and this, therefore, they postponed. But the moral effect of this manœuvre they could not postpone. Lord Melbourne had, within no lengthened period before the crisis arrived, treated the demand for a total repeal of the import-duties on grain as little better than a hallucination of lunacy; and the contrast of this with their present course by no means acted favourably in their behalf. Within the short period of about ten years, they had sunk from the height of popularity down to zero; and no finesse could go even the shortest way in reinstating them in the position they had deservedly lost.

The prorogation of parliament took place on the 22d June, and the dissolution quickly followed. From that moment the event of the coming election was not doubted. The favourable feelings under which the Whig party had arrived at power in 1830, and the resistless enthusiasm which carried them triumphantly through the perilous crisis of the reform-measure of 1832, had totally disappeared; and in the breasts of some deep hatred had taken their place; in the breasts of others thorough contempt; in the breasts of most leaden disappointment. Consequently, excepting by their immediate retainers or hired partisans, no effort was made to sustain the ministry. Of those of extreme politics some voted openly for the Conservative candidates, whilst others refused to vote, and, standing by, were glad to see the Tory candidates succeed.

The result was, that in many places the leaders of the liberal party were signally defeated, and the little remaining strength of the ministerialists was entirely prostrated. Never was reaction more marked and complete. In the first reformed House of Commons the Conservative leader could hardly muster one hundred followers; in the same reformed House of Commons eight years were now proved to be sufficient to give Sir Robert Peel a majority of nearly one hundred. Such was the reactionary effect of promises rashly given and contemptuously broken; and such the inherent weakness of the Whig party when bereft of the sympathy of the great majority of the people.

When the new parliament met on the 19th August 1841, no doubt of the destruction of the ministry being at hand remained in the breast of any one. To the very last their conduct was impolitic. Had they proposed some alteration in the scale of duties calculated to produce a lower average price for grain, the landed interest might have hesitated. But the proposal of a fixed duty, to most ears, sounded as a proposal to get rid of all duties; and for this the landlords were not yet ripe, though, even at that time, many experienced persons saw that "to this complexion it must come at last." Amongst the holders of land there was only one opinion. Every one believed that, in the event of scarcity, a fixed duty could not be maintained; and that when once suspended, the struggle against its reimposition would be overwhelming. Hence, all connected with the soil struggled with all their energies for Sir Robert Peel; whilst the whole body of the

working-classes, alienated for ever from the *soi-disant* "liberal party" by the refusal of the suffrage and the inhumanities of the Malthusians and their poor-law, stood sullenly aloof, or else acted openly with the active partisans of a Peel ministry. Against this the assistance of the Anti Corn-law League was of little avail. That league was yet in its infancy; and it had, by promulgating amongst the manufacturers the absurd notion that a fall in the price of grain necessarily involved also a reduction in the rate of wages, made the operatives everywhere its enemies; so that as a counterpoise against the Peel party it was valueless. The results of this strange state of opinion were now to be apparent; and for this a very few days proved sufficient.

It had been arranged by the Conservative party to move amendments upon the address in answer to her Majesty's speech in both Houses; and as the shortest way of bringing the question to an issue, it had been also arranged that the amendment to be moved should be the same in each House, and so worded as to express a want of confidence in the existing ministry. Under this arrangement, the first blow was struck in the House of Lords, when the Earl of Ripon ("Prosperity Robinson") moved the amendment agreed upon, which was carried, as it was sure to be, by a large majority.* In the House of Commons, on the same

* The amendment, moved by Lord Ripon, was as follows:—"We humbly represent to your Majesty, that we observe with great concern that the public expenditure has of late, in each of several successive years, exceeded the annual, income and that we are convinced

day (August 24), the same amendment to the Commons' address was moved by Mr J. Stuart Wortley, seconded by Lord Bruce. That the amendment moved by Mr Wortley would certainly be carried, and by a large majority, was well known; yet before it was suffered to be so carried, the discussion was prolonged through four evenings of stormy debate. The passions on both sides were roused to a considerable extent. Amongst the most excitable portion of the

of the necessity of adopting measures for the purpose of remedying so great an evil.

"We assure your Majesty that we are deeply sensible of the importance of those considerations to which your Majesty has been graciously pleased to direct our attention, in reference to the commerce and revenue of the country, and to the laws which regulate the trade in corn:

"That in deciding the course which it may be advisable to pursue, with reference to such matters, it will be our earnest desire to consult the interest and promote the welfare of all classes of your Majesty's subjects:

"That we feel it, however, to be our duty humbly to submit to your Majesty, that it is essential to the satisfactory results of our deliberations upon these and other matters of public concern, that your Majesty's government should possess the confidence of this House and of the country; and respectfully to represent to your Majesty, that that confidence is not reposed in the present advisers of your Majesty.

"We assure your Majesty that, in the gracious expression of your Majesty's deep sympathy with those of your Majesty's subjects who are now suffering from distress and want of employment, we recognise an additional proof of your Majesty's tender regard for the welfare of your Majesty's subjects, and we cordially join in the prayer of your Majesty, that all our deliberations may be guided by wisdom, an may conduce to the happiness of your Majesty's people."

House—the Irish members—the irritation was very great. For Sir Robert Peel, their leader, Mr O'Connell, had cherished a life-long hatred, and this rancorous feeling had extended itself amongst the Irish liberal members of all grades. Under the Melbourne government, they had enjoyed as large a share of lucrative patronage as Lord Melbourne had dared to bestow. In return, they had supported his government; and whilst O'Connell, by means of a sham agitation, kept the Irish people at the boiling point, they enjoyed such benefits as the liberal cabinet ventured to bestow, and prompted them in all such measures as had a tendency to sap the Church Establishment, the overthrow of which was unquestionably Mr O'Connell's principal object. All this was now, in spite of every effort on the part of the agitator to prop the effete regime of the Whig party, to be reversed, and with it Mr O'Connell's own position. From this time it seemed almost a political necessity that he should either destroy Sir Robert Peel, or be destroyed by him. No pseudo-agitation was thenceforward of any use; and the alternative was, that either Mr O'Connell should, under the withering influence of Sir Robert's administration, sink into a comparative insignificance, or else, by carrying agitation to the very verge and brink of rebellion, wring from him that repeal of the Union which, in a rash hour, he had made the last card in his game.

By the English Liberals the debate was conducted with somewhat less of heat; but recriminations were bandied about without hesitation; and when Mr Roebuck

taunted the Whigs with producing their own ruin by strangling every measure calculated to benefit the suffering people, Lord John Russell asked him, in reply, how he should relish being told that, by falsifying every maxim of his life, and supporting measures that he had hitherto condemned, he might become an eminent Conservative leader? Sir Robert Peel, with his usual caution and self-control, let this wordy war of passion exhaust itself, and only spoke at the close of the debate, on the fourth evening. He had the advantage of speaking after an address by Mr O'Connell, in which that gentleman, who always suited his topics to the hour with a convenient forgetfulness of the past, finding it now eligible to exalt the character of the Whigs as a political party, loaded them with praises, which contrasted very curiously with some of the terrible denunciations with which, after the Coercion-act, it was his habit to assail them; and of this Sir Robert Peel was not slow to take advantage.

"If I felt more acutely than, in fact, I do (commenced the right honourable baronet), either for myself or the party with whom I am connected, the weight of the censure and vituperation which the honourable and learned gentleman has cast at us, still I could find some topic of consolation in the fact that, whatever may be his present abuse of the Tory party, it falls infinitely short of that which he has lavished upon his own beloved Whigs! The honourable and learned gentleman has, in fact, reduced himself to a position in which his praise and his censure are equally valuable. If these are the men who have been so good to Ireland—if these are the men who, for ten years, have preserved that country in happiness and tranquillity, what can justify the honourable and learned gentleman

in having loaded them with every species of calumny? Are these 'the base, brutal, and bloody Whigs?' And when the honourable and learned member accounted for the cause of their difficulty and embarrassment in the government of Ireland, did he not bear in mind that there is not a distinguished member of that party who has not been honoured by his vituperation? For ten years (he says) this government had ruled over Ireland, and secured to her—what?—tranquillity and order. In four of these ten years, my noble friend near me (Lord Stanley) was Secretary for Ireland;—yes, for four out of these ten years the man whom you deprecate was the immediate agent of Whig policy as to Ireland. I ask, sir, is it then really the fact that these men acted in a way to deserve well of Ireland? If so, then I ask what has been the object—what the motive—of the honourable and learned gentleman in coming down to this House, night after night, increasing the difficulties and embarrassments of this government, and denouncing them to the country by every calumnious expression which an imagination fertile in calumny could suggest?"

Passing over the references to foreign affairs embodied in the Queen's speech, and blaming the ministry exceedingly for some of their proceedings as to Canada, Sir Robert applied himself to domestic matters, and commented at great length on the ministerial proposition as to the duties on sugar, which he criticised severely. At length, arriving at the most pressing question of all, that of the corn-laws, he continued thus:—

"I now approach the more important and exciting question of the corn-laws. In order that I may make no mistake, allow me to refer to the expressions of which I made use before the dissolution of parliament as to this point. I then said that, on consideration, I had formed an opinion which intervening consideration has not induced me to alter, that the principle of a

graduated scale was preferable to that of a fixed and irrevocable duty, but I said then, and I say now, and in doing so I repeat the language which I held in 1839, that I would not bind myself to the details of the existing law, but will reserve to myself the unfettered discretion of considering and amending that law. I hold similar language now. But if you ask me whether I bind myself to the maintenance of the existing law in its details, or if you say that such is the condition or compact on which the agricultural interest give me their support, I say on that condition I will not accept their support. (Continued cheers from both sides.) Honourable gentlemen cheer; but am I not maintaining precisely what I said before? I know it is the fashion, but I confess it appears to me to savour of intolerance for some gentlemen opposite to assume that they are right, and that those who differ from them are not only in error—that is the infirmity of our inferior judgments—but that, in holding these opinions, they are actuated by base and sordid notions. The right honourable gentleman says that there exist great errors in taking the averages. Perhaps so; but would any man of common sense debar himself of a full opportunity of correcting such errors? There may be various modes of correcting such errors; but I avoid entering upon details. (Hear.) As I said before, I repeat I must reserve to myself the unfettered power of considering details. Now, you are not satisfied I know. The whole stream of obloquy that has been directed against me, and which, after an experience of about thirty years, has produced as little of irritation or of uncomfortable feeling in my mind as it would perhaps in that of any man, has flowed from this:—that I will not now state what alterations I mean to propose. It is said to me, 'Although you prefer the principle of a graduated scale, still you do not tell us what your scale will be.' I ask any reasonable man whether a more preposterous demand was ever made upon a public man than that he should not only declare his preference of a principle, but explain to the whole world, and bind himself irrevocably

to the mode in which he thinks to carry it out? You made the demand in May last, and you have remained in office ever since. You said to me, even in May last, 'You are coming into power; we are going out. There is a candidate for power on the eve of advent to office, and he will not tell us what his sliding-scale will be.' What now, if I had done so? Your demand proceeded upon the assumption that you were about to quit office; and if I had explained my plans on the 18th May, you would, in the interval between that time and the present, have occupied yourselves in attacking my details,—ay, and as far as lay in your power, rendering it impossible for me to carry them into effect. (Laughter and cheers.) If I had, on the 18th May, given the details of a plan which events have proved I could not have proposed at the earliest before the middle of October, my opponents everywhere would have been engaged in stifling and condemning it; and then I should have been told that I was bound by an irrevocable pledge to adhere to it. If I had attempted to deviate, however slightly, I should have been subjected to this imputation, 'Here is a man who came forward with the details of a plan which he offered to carry when in opposition; and now when he has got into power he has altered its details.' I was an individual member of parliament, standing, I admit, in a very peculiar position, as honoured with the confidence of a powerful party; but I contend I was under no obligation to furnish you with a budget. (Laughter and cheers.) If this was to be expected from me, why should we maintain an immensely expensive civil government? If an individual, without those means of obtaining information which ministers possess, is expected to furnish such measures and details as seem to have been expected from me, of what use is our civil government, with all its enormously expensive establishments? I can prove that you yourselves really feel that you ought not to require that which you ask from me; I shall prove that you feel the justice of my objecting to it. Why do you give me a year to consider the Poor-law

Amendment-act? (Hear, hear, hear.) Why not demand of me the production of the details of a measure on that subject? (Hear, hear.) It, too, has been long a topic for controversy,—for bitter controversy; and that requirement would be just as reasonable. You know very well that to afford opportunity of sifting and attacking a measure in popular assemblies tends to prejudice its consideration by parliament. So it was said, 'Tell us what your pivot will be.' Suppose I had done this, and afterwards proceeded to form a government. What follows? I must, I presume, have informed her Majesty that the great principle of the government was to centre in an adherence to my pivot. (Laughter and cheers.) 'I was to go to each colleague and to ask his assent to belong to the new government; but I was to tell him, 'There is one irrevocable principle to which you must subscribe;—not a preference to a graduated scale over a fixed duty;—not that, but this precise mode of taking averages, and this particular pivot, which is already determined upon, and from which there is no departure, because I am pledged to it.' I leave a blank for the name. But can any reasonable man gravely say that was a course I ought to pursue? Why, sir, a demand more thoroughly preposterous was never made upon a public man than that. I, not being in office, but supposed by you to be a candidate for power, should declare what precise measure in the shape of a corn-law I meant to propose in the event—in the distant event—contingent upon your own conduct, of my obtaining power. I stated all this before the elections; and no demand, no solicitation, no sifting, no ridicule, shall induce me to depart from it."

Sir Robert then went on to expose the utter absurdity of the supposition that any fixed duty on grain would be maintained in a season of dearth or of famine. After describing the effect on the markets of

a single year or more of deficient harvests in England, he thus proceeded:—

"Suppose, I say, all this taking place in September or October next, would you then insist on a rigorous exaction of your eight shillings duty? (*An honourable member*, 'Yes! I would!') You would? then I publicly notify to the country, upon the authority of a great manufacturer and a stern free-trader, that be corn even at 80s., or at 90s., or even at 100s. *per quarter*, his rigid adherence to the doctrines of free trade will compel him, under such circumstances, to exact his duty of 8s.! Then, when the honourable member for Stockport (Mr Cobden) shall come forward with distressing tales of the misery of the poor, when others shall come forward with their sympathy, and I sincerely believe unfeigned sympathy, with these distresses and sufferings on the part of the poor, sufferings of which they themselves are cognizant—when they shall say, 'Here is grain at 90s., nay 100s.;' when foreign supplies are coming in;—then, their neighbour and friend (the member who answered 'yes') is to say, 'No matter what distress prevails; no matter what the extent of privation; no matter what the amount of suffering;—yet still the duty of 8s. must be exacted;—I tell you there is no power to remit it!' (Cheers.) In vain it is to be to show that, under the present laws, this corn would be admitted at 1s. per quarter. In vain we are to draw a comparison between the state of the law now (defective as it may be), which admits grain when there *is* a scarcity. In vain shall we contrast the law which admits grain when dearth exists with that which exacts 8s. irrevocably and under all circumstances. No matter! Honourable gentleman affirm that they will adhere sternly to their 8s., and that the importer shall be tied to the letter of his bond! (Hear, hear!) Sir, it may be very fine to make all this parade of a strict adherence to a principle, but I tell you that, under those circumstances, the duty of 8s. could not be levied. (Hear!) You

would be compelled to admit a relaxation of it, either by the power of parliament or by some subordinate authority. How will you provide for that relaxation? Will you provide that when corn shall arrive at a certain price, the council shall be required to abate the duty? If you do, then must you also maintain the system of averages. And then, I say, that in that case the right honourable gentleman must apply himself to the correction of the system of averages; for there would still be the same temptation as now to deal with the averages, when there should be a price fixed enabling the privy-council to relax the duty."

Leaving the question of corn-laws and the relative good or bad policy of a fixed duty or a fluctuating scale, Sir Robert proceeded to reply to the criticisms on his own conduct in holding power in 1835, after the vote on the choice of a Speaker had in reality and virtually decided the ultimate fate of his government. With this view, he continued as follows, after a recapitulation of some of the circumstances:—

"Do not suppose that I call upon a minister, upon the first intimation of dissent or of distrust, at once to throw up office. No. He owes obligations to the crown which would not warrant him in taking a course thus precipitate. After the division on the Speakership (in 1835), I knew that the fate of my government was sealed, and I at once came to the determination to resign; but, at the same time, I did not, and do not, think I exercised an undue discretion in continuing in power during the period I did so continue. But my position, at that period, was perfectly different from that of her Majesty's government at this present moment. It is now upwards of two years since the government declared their own opinion that they had *not* sufficiently the confidence of this House to enable

them to discharge satisfactorily their public duties; and I firmly believe that their retention of power, in defiance of the constitutional principle, which declares that any ministry that undertakes to conduct the affairs of this country must possess the confidence of the House of Commons, has weighed more with the British constituencies than all the other misdeeds of which Lord Melbourne and his colleagues have been guilty. Lord Melbourne himself declared that the worst government was that which could not execute its measures. He declared that great interests might be exposed to hazard by a minister attempting to hold office after he had lost power. These words made their impression upon the public mind. Hence, in my opinion at least, the result of the late general election was a vindication, on the part of the people, of the great constitutional principle—which every friend of a representative system ought to hold in honour—that the favour and support of the crown ought not to maintain, for any long or any indefinite period, a ministry in existence against the will of the representatives of the people. It compromises, instead of strengthening the prerogative of the monarchy, because it exhibits the prerogatives of a monarchy without their just end; and it exhibits the House of Commons without its just influence, when it can condemn and thwart the actions but cannot decide the fate of an administration."

The conclusion of this well-reasoned address was lofty and dignified; and it embodies one of those passages by which the minister studied to impress the House with the idea of his independence of external influences, but which unquestionably rebounded upon him when those influences, as was his case through life, proved at length victorious. Having alluded to the state of Ireland, the Premier, for such he now virtually was, thus concluded:—

"With my views of government—with my views of the obligations which it imposes, of the duties which it entails, of the sacrifices which it involves, I am little disposed indeed to add to those sacrifices by accepting it with a degrading or a dishonourable condition. I am told, sir, that, in the exercise of power, I must be the instrument of maintaining opinions and feelings which I myself am disposed to repudiate. I am told that I must necessarily be the instrument of effecting objects in Ireland which I myself disapprove. I am asked whether I dare affront my associates and partisans. The honourable member for Meath (Mr Henry Grattan) alluded to the conduct of a public functionary in Ireland, who, he said, had offered an insult to the religious feelings of his fellow-countrymen, by some public act of a most offensive nature. I am not afraid of expressing my opinion with respect to acts like this (hear, hear, from both sides); and I say at once, that there is no man in this House, no Roman-catholic member of this House, who could hear with pain deeper than I did, or deeper regret than I did, that a gratuitous and unprovoked insult, and an unnecessary insult, had been offered to the religious feelings of the people of Ireland. If I cannot gain power or retain it except by encouraging and favouring such feelings, I say at once, that the day on which I relinquish power, rather than defer to such feelings, will be a ten times prouder one than the day on which I obtained it. If I do accept office, it shall be by no intrigue; it shall be after no unworthy concession of constitutional principle; it shall be by no unnatural and factious combinations with men—honest I believe them to be—entertaining extreme opinions from which I entirely dissent. If I attain office, it shall be by walking in the open light, and in the direct paths of the constitution. If I exercise power, it shall be upon my conception—perhaps imperfect, perhaps mistaken—but yet my sincere conception of public duty. That power, I repeat, I will not hold unless I can hold it consistently with the maintenance of my own opinions; and that power I will relinquish the mo-

ment I am satisfied that I am not supported in the maintenance of them by the confidence of this House and the people of this country."

After an address from Lord John Russell, the House divided, when there appeared for the amendment, 360; for the original address, 269, giving Sir Robert Peel and his friends a majority of 91: a division which, without any great stretch of injustice, may be called the *coup de grace* of the powerful party which it displaced; for although on two several occasions, through the forbearance, or else the direct aid of Sir Robert Peel and his friends, they have assumed and continued to hold power for a short period, their influence over the people has never recovered, and probably never will recover, the shocks which it underwent during their *régime* from 1830 to 1841, unless revived by some advance on their part similar to that of the reform-bill of 1831. From the history of this memorable debate two important facts are evolved: one is the distinct admission, on the part of Sir Robert Peel and his party, that some relaxation of the provisions restricting the import of grain must now necessarily be conceded; the other is the admission, for the first time, by both sides of the House, without one word of limitation or qualification, of the existence of a universal want of confidence, want of profit, and want of employment, which could not be explained by any reasoning customary in such cases, and the various attempts to explain which were more numerous than successful. These two admissions form an important prelude to the act of this extraordinary drama, which was now about to

commence. They tell us that, from the very day of the resumption of office by Sir Robert Peel, he became exposed to that pressure of events which had been the means of first destroying the popularity and then the administration of his predecessors. They show us how it happened that his difficulties commenced with the very birth of his triumph, and they help to form the key to the whole extraordinary history of that government which now commenced under his auspices. The division of the night of the 27th of August was of course the signal for the resignation of Lord Melbourne and his colleagues, which immediately took place, and was announced by Lord John Russell in the Commons on the 30th of August, when the House adjourned to give Sir Robert Peel time to form his ministry.

CHAPTER VII.

Sir Robert Peel's Ministry of 1841—Conservative Triumph—Sir Robert's Estimate of his own Position—Deep Stagnation of Trade—Its Continuance—Session of 1842—Sir Robert proposes a modified Sliding-scale; also relaxes the Tariff—His Plans carried by large Majorities—Energy of the Anti Corn-law League—Alarming Deficiency of the Revenue—Sir Robert's financial Exposition—He proposes an Income-tax for Three Years—Its Injustice and Delusion—The Income-tax carried—Sir Robert recognises, in the House, the Principle of Free-trade—Exultation of the Leaguers and Economists—Alarm of the High Conservative Party—Renewal of the Poor-law—The Economists support the Minister—Committee of Banking Inquiry—Its Report—Sir Robert's Uneasiness as to the Monetary Affairs of the Country—Mr O'Connell agitates a Repeal of the Union—His really desperate Condition—Critical State of Ireland in 1843—Sir Robert Peel's Calmness—The Monster Meetings—Treasonable Speeches and Publications—Meeting at Tara—Extraordinary Conduct of O'Connell—Continued Forbearance of Sir Robert Peel—Clontarf Meeting stopped—O'Connell and his Confederates arrested—Their Trial and Sentence—Rapid Fall of Mr O'Connell's Power—Railway Mania—Bank-act of 1844—Mr Gilbart's Evidence—Factory Bills—The Working-classes aid the Leaguers—The Czar visits the Queen—His real Motive—His Reception.

By "those hounds who do not hunt, but only serve to fill up the cry," the triumph of Sir Robert Peel was taken to be a triumph of the ancient conservative principle. They deemed it a return to the maxims

of Liverpool and Eldon, Sidmouth, Colchester, and Bexley; and if Sir Robert Peel was to make some ostensible change in the corn-law as a sop to the Economists and Free-traders, it was expected to be so infinitesimally small as not to amount to an appreciable alteration. That the Premier himself saw his elevation in a very different light cannot be doubted. Exact as were his perceptions of the state of public opinion, he could not be ignorant that a portion of his success arose less from admiration of him than from dislike to his opponents; and that such support cannot be lasting unless something be done to change comparative into positive approbation. To one situated as he was, this, however, was the most difficult of tasks. To please those who desired change was to offend those who eschewed progress; yet such were the difficulties of the position, that something now was to be done to avert the consequences which seemed to be impending.

To Sir Robert Peel it was well known that the nation, and especially the manufacturing and trading classes, were in a state of deep uneasiness and growing discontent. The collapse which followed the monetary crisis of 1839 was yet unrelieved, and the people had not yet learned to bear this sort of privation with patient endurance, nor to baffle and elude its worser consequences by artifice. They had not yet learned to encroach upon each other's callings—to engraft trade upon trade—nor to turn the plain shop into a gigantic bazaar, where one roof covered twenty crafts. Neither had they yet arrived at that art of skilful deterioration which can

keep the promise to the eye whilst it breaks it to the use, in which at this day our manufacturers and artisans are such adepts. Hence the benumbing effect of the monetary reaction paralyzed every market, and a deathly film of stagnation seemed to overspread everything. Those who could have moved dared not; and those who would have dared to move could not. All industry seemed to be steeped in a sort of lethal stupor. The nation appeared to be struck with a catalepsy, and the economic future to be a blank. In short, between 1840 and 1843 inclusive, there did not occur one of those temporary waves of reaction which, when nations are sinking, conceal from them their own decadence, and, when they are rising, reversing the process, blind them for a time to their own progress.

In the foreign relations of the country at this period, the difficulties were little less than those of our domestic affairs. France had, by the audacious Syrian expedition of 1840, been both isolated and irritated; and Louis Philippe, disgusted with the British alliance, was seeking to extend his influence in Spain and in Italy. Russia, to whom aggression is a trade, and to whom a course of constant and insidious treachery seems to be the element most natural, was ruling almost supreme at Constantinople, at Teheran, and at Athens, where British influence seemed on the point of being extinguished; whilst in the United States of America, a party bitterly hostile to this country was employed in fomenting the troubles which arose from American interference with the Canadian rebels, and in widening the breach which the long-protracted

dispute as to the boundary of the State of Maine had already produced. Such was the state in which the new Premier found the affairs of Great Britain at home and abroad; and when to these distractions was added a deficient revenue, together with a deep and apparently hopeless monetary stagnation, it must be owned there was enough to give pause to the most subtle and resolute statesman. Sir Robert accordingly acted with his customary caution. Having formed his administration, he resolved to consider well and carefully the whole position of the country before he committed himself to any series of remedial measures.* Nor

* The administration of 1841 was as follows:—First Lord of the Treasury, Sir Robert Peel; Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst; President of the Council, Lord Wharncliffe; First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Haddington; Lord Privy Seal, the Duke of Buckingham; Home Secretary, Sir James Graham; Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen; Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley; President of Board of Control, Lord Ellenborough; Secretary at War, Sir Henry Hardinge; President of Board of Trade, the Earl of Ripon; Chancellor of Exchequer, Mr Goulburn; Paymaster-General, Sir Edward Knatchbull. Not of the Cabinet:—Postmaster-General, Lord Lowther; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Granville Somerset; First Commissioner of Land Revenue, the Earl of Lincoln; Vice-President of Board of Trade, William Ewart Gladstone; Master-general of Ordnance, Sir George Murray; Attorney-general, Sir Frederick Pollock; Solicitor-general, Sir William W. Follett. IRELAND:—Lord Lieutenant, Earl de Grey; Lord Chancellor, Sir Edward Sugden; Chief Secretary, Lord Eliot; Attorney-general, Mr Blackburne; Solicitor-general, Mr Pennefather. SCOTLAND:—Lord Advocate, Sir William Rae, Solicitor-general, Mr Duncan M'Neill. HOUSEHOLD:—Lord Steward, the Earl of Liverpool; Lord Chamberlain, Earl de la Warr; Master of the Horse, the Earl of Jersey.

could he be driven from this reserve, although, with a disregard of consistency not a little surprising, his opponents lost no time in attempting to force him to enter, without even a month's delay, upon the exposition of such remedial measures as the position of national affairs might appear to him to dictate. They had themselves, when in power, resisted every motion for a committee of inquiry into the state of the country, and the causes of its sufferings and difficulties. Their table was loaded with petitions, passed by great public meetings from the most populous parts of the kingdom, ascribing the pressure and difficulty to the working of the rash and pernicious Act of 1819, which doubled at once the value of money and the weight of the taxes; and praying for inquiry. From Birmingham, from Manchester, from Leeds, from Edinburgh, from Glasgow, from Newcastle, from Sunderland, from Sheffield, from Norwich, from York, from Westminster, from Southwark, from Finsbury, from Tower Hamlets, and from Marylebone, petitions embodying these asseverations and this prayer had been sent, and sent in vain.

It is true that Sir Robert Peel himself, and the entire body of Economists within the House of all shades of politics, had assisted the Grey and Melbourne ministers in thus setting at defiance the wishes of a majority of the nation, because they feared the result of the evidence which would have been brought to bear upon a measure which perpetrated that monstrous act of injustice. As soon as Sir Robert was forced into power, however, his opponents changed

their tactics. They admitted the widely spread distress, which before they had either denied, or so qualified in their admissions as to make it equivalent to denial, and then urged upon Sir Robert that the national suffering was too severe to admit even of the delay necessary to enable the prime minister to obtain evidence of its reality, nature, and extent.* These insidious and inconsistent arguments Sir Robert steadily resisted.

The pressure upon the country, dreadfully severe as it was, had continued unmitigated for two years; and he resolved to employ the autumn in collecting information and framing such measures as he could devise to meet the exigence. The remaining measures of the session were accordingly such as this cautious course dictated. The necessary supplies were voted, and the continuation of the poor-law commission—a thing deprecated by all who had any respect for the free constitution of England—was voted for six months

* "I can only say that I heard, with great concern, the intention of the right honourable gentleman *not* to propose any measure of importance during the present session of parliament. I will not say that, during the last few days in which the right honourable gentleman has been occupied, agreeably with the instructions given him by her Majesty, in the formation and construction of the government, he can have given any very great share of his attention to the measures which he may wish to introduce; but considering the great length of time that has elapsed since the proposal of important measures (the alteration in the corn-law, proposed at the eleventh hour) by the late administration, *and considering the present state of the country* (!), I must say that, in my opinion, the government, as now constituted, ought at once—or in the course of the present autumn—to lay before parliament the measures it intends to propose."—*Lord John Russell's Speech, September* 16, 1841.

longer, but not until after a debate which produced some appalling evidence of the homicidal effects of the manufacturing system upon the wellbeing of the unhappy population engaged in it.*

* "Mr Oastler was heartily engaged in forwarding the welfare of the operatives. It was he who put a stop to the system of dragging out the poor people of the south of England to the manufacturing districts, that they might fill up the places of those who had been brought to their end by this accursed system. Mr Oastler said:—

"The official 'comparative table of the duration of life' proves to demonstration that the unremitting labour of the factories is actually more destructive to human life than famine, war, or pestilence! I started from the perusal of that table with indescribable horror—I could scarcely believe my eyes! But the facts are indisputable, the data most correct. The horrible factory system is making a charnel-house of England—it cuts off life at both ends. It works the living to death. It genders death—untimely death—even in the womb. It destroys the stamina of both father and mother. It ushers into the world children incapable of life. It actually cuts off *one-half* of the years of human existence! I do not exaggerate. I appeal to the official table of births and deaths. The following extracts will prove if I am not abundantly borne out in all I am asserting. In every ten thousand burials, in the under-mentioned places, read the awful results."

	Places.	Died under Five Years of Age.	Died under Twenty Years of Age	Died under Forty Years of Age.	Lived above Forty Years.
	Rutland,	2865	3756	5031	4969
	London,	3805	4580	6111	3869
Factory Districts.	Bradford (Yorkshire)	4687	5896	7061	2939
	Macclesfield,	4462	5889	7300	2700
	Wigan,	4790	5911	7117	2883
	Preston,	4947	6083	7462	2538
	Bury,	4864	6017	7319	2601
	Stockport,	4879	6005	7367	2633
	Bolton,	4939	6113	7459	2541
	Leeds,	5286	6213	7441	2559
	Holbeck,	5090	6133	7337	2663

In consequence of this cautious resolve of the Premier, the session of parliament was brought to a close on the 7th of October; Sir Robert Peel being ostensibly desirous to spend the remainder of the year in planning such remedial measures as he might

The following is an extract from the Report of the Committee on the bill to regulate the labour of factory children. Mr Sadler, Chairman,—

"Now, if you take the average of the above nine factory-districts and compare it with Rutland and London, the result will be as follows:—As compared with Rutland, an increase of deaths under five years of age of 2017; under twenty years of age of 2272; under forty years of age of 2267. As compared with London, the increase of deaths will be found to be, under five years of age 1077; under twenty years of age 1446; under forty years of age 1207. In Rutland the survivors at forty years are more by 2287, out of every 10,000; and in London 1207, than they are on the average in these nine factory-districts. In fact, the murderous result, developed by this official table, is that about as many human beings die before their *twentieth* year, in the factory-districts, as before their *fortieth* year, on an average, elsewhere. It is necessary that I should inform you that Manchester is excluded from this official table, because the returns of burials from that place were so incomplete as to render them useless for this comparison. But we have the evidence of the Assistant Poor-law Commissioner, Dr Kaye, that 'in Manchester, more than one-half of the offspring of the poor die before they have completed their fifth year.' And in proof that the factory-system impoverishes and degrades as well as kills its victims, the doctor adds, 'more than one-half of the inhabitants of Manchester are either so destitute or so degraded as to require the assistance of public charity in bringing their offspring into the world!'"

Mr Ferrand's Speech, September 28, 1841.

Where the children of both sexes are sent into the factories too early to allow of their being taught the most common duties of life, poverty, vice, and disease, must be the consequences necessarily.

deem requisite to alleviate the heavy pressure on the country. It was well known, however, to many that it would be in vain to expect from him any acknowledgment of the principal cause of that pressure. Most reflecting men, therefore, deemed that the measures in preparation would be framed with the view of meeting the ideas in part of that description of reasoners who deemed that a relaxation of the tariff could render the weight of a doubled taxation unfelt, or a reduction of the rental of the land cure the want of mercantile profit and of adequate remuneration for industry; and the event proved that these anticipations, as well as that which shadowed forth a coming income-tax, were amply founded.

Parliament met on the 3d of February 1842, amidst a state of public feeling in which fear predominated over hope. The monetary stagnation which, whilst it depressed agriculture, was driving the manufacturing and trading classes of every description into almost despair, went on unchanged and unmitigated; nor could any man perceive how it was to be materially alleviated. Hence, the coming measures of the new government were viewed with curiosity rather than expectation; and many eagerly looked for the measures of Sir Robert Peel with the hope of something specious and bold, rather than sound and good. The royal speech, as usual, conveyed mere hints as to the state of foreign relations and the domestic measures about to be proposed. It announced a renewal of diplomatic intercourse with the Shah of Persia, which the siege of Herat and the intrigues of the agents of

the Czar had, for some time, suspended; and at the same time informed the nation of the completion of another of those hollow treaties "for the defence of Turkey," entered into by the western powers, the constant effect of which has been to encourage aggressions upon her and increase her dangers. The hostilities with the Chinese, arising out of the forced sale of opium in defiance of the law of the empire, were alluded to, with hope of a conclusion; and some free-trading negotiations with the European powers were cautiously named, and only named. The domestic concerns were of a graver character, and were more markedly mentioned; the alarming deficiency of the revenue being put first; and the coming change in the sliding scale and in the tariff were briefly touched. These topics, with that of some change in the law of bankruptcy, which may be (with pauperism and fisheries) denominated one of the standing topics of parliament, made up the staple of the speech, which was quite of the usual character.

In the House of Commons, the Premier lost no time in pushing forward the measures of amelioration which the delay of a few months had enabled him to mature; and his first act was to give notice that, on Thursday the 9th February, he should move that the House resolve itself into a committee to take into consideration the state of the corn-laws. To the discussion of a subject now so absorbing, no one was unwise enough to attempt to cause any delay; and on the 9th of February, accordingly, Sir Robert Peel rose and moved that the paragraph in her Majesty's speech which related to the state

of the corn-laws be read, which having been done, the Premier again rose to propose his plan to the House.

Of the address, which embodied Sir Robert Peel's proposed changes, it would be useless to enter into any long detail. The important portions of it were, as matter of course, calculations as to prices, and figures conveying various statistical particulars. The Premier seemed anxious to combat an idea, certainly ill founded but widely entertained, that, under a fixed duty, the fluctuations would be less than under a variable scale of duties, and least of all were the duties on imported grain altogether swept away. Against this notion the right honourable baronet argued very successfully, except in one instance, when he referred to the American United States as a country subject to great fluctuations in the prices of corn, and yet without a corn-law. In this he was mistaken. Since the period of their independence, these States have always levied some import-duty both upon grain and seeds; but Sir Robert was quite correct in asserting that in these States the fluctuations in these markets have been more extraordinary than even in the British markets. In this fact he was correct; but he ought to have added that a large portion of these vicissitudes must in fairness be ascribed to the fluctuations of the ill-regulated paper circulation of the United States, the effects produced by which can only be paralleled by a reference to the French *assignats* of the earlier years of the revolution. In the course of his address, the Premier also combatted the assertions, so liberally made by

the Anti Corn-law League, that to the existing restrictions upon the import of grain the whole difficulties of the country were assignable. This he denied; and very properly referred to the collapse which followed the reckless operations of the joint-stock banks in 1836-7, the ruin of the American trade, and the critical position of the Bank of England in 1839 and 1840.

One significant omission, however, he made, which nobody supplied, by stating the fact from either side of the House, that the brief ease which the country felt, for some months prior to the crash of 1836-7, was to be assigned to the increased circulation and diminished value of money; and that the collapse and pressure which followed that transient alleviation, were only the fruit of the restoration of the currency to the standard fixed for it by the Act of 1819. With these exceptions, the address of the minister was a powerful and well reasoned exposition of a moderate and cautious policy. The pivot upon which all hinged was the scale of duties to be imposed, which the proposer calculated likely to give an average price for wheat of 56s. *per quarter;* an anticipation which, had time been allowed, would most probably have been substantially realized.*

* Scale of Duties Proposed by Sir Robert Peel, February 9, 1842.

Prices.	Duty.	Wheat.
At 50s. and under 51s.	20s.	For every quarter under 51s.
„ 51 „ 52	19	
„ 52 „ 53	18	At 52s. and under 55s.
„ 53 „ 54		
„ 54 „ 55		

It must be noted, however, that the whole tenor of the Premier's speech, on this interesting occasion, indicates that he did not then in the least anticipate the sweeping measures which a few years produced; and

Prices	Duty.	Wheat.
At 55s. and under 56s.	17s.	At 52s. and under 55s.
„ 56 „ 57	16	
„ 57 „ 58	15	
„ 58 „ 59	14	
„ 59 „ 60	13	
„ 60 „ 61	12	
„ 61 „ 62	11	
„ 62 „ 63	10	
„ 63 „ 64	9	
„ 64 „ 65	8	
„ 65 „ 66	7	
„ 66 „ 67	6	At 66s. and under 69s.
„ 67 „ 68		
„ 68 „ 69		
„ 69 „ 70	5	
„ 70 „ 71	4	
„ 71 „ 72	3	
„ 72 „ 73	2	
„ 73 and upwards.	1	

Prices.	Duty.	Oats.
At 18s. and under 19s.	8s.	For every quarter under 19s.
„ 19 „ 20	7	
„ 20 „ 21	6	
„ 21 „ 22		
„ 22 „ 23		
„ 23 „ 24	5	
„ 24 „ 25	4	
„ 25 „ 26	3	
„ 26 „ 27	2	
„ 27 and upwards.	1	

that whilst he disclaimed proposing these duties as any *bonus* to agriculture, he calculated that, in average seasons, the country would grow enough to supply its people at the average price of from 54s. to 58s. *per quarter*. His words are these:—

"My belief is, and the belief of my colleagues is, that it is important for this country, that it is of the highest importance to the welfare of all classes in this country, that you should take care that the main sources of your supply of corn should be derived from domestic agriculture; whilst we also feel that any additional price that you may pay in effecting that object, is an additional price that cannot be vindicated as a *bonus* or premium to agriculture, but only on the ground of its being an advantage to the country at large.

* * * * * * *

Whilst therefore I am opposed to any system of protection, on the ground merely of defending the interest of a particular class, I, on the other hand, would certainly not be a party to any

Prices.	Duty.	Barley.
At 25s. and under 26s.	11s.	For every quarter under 26s.
„ 26 „ 27	10	
„ 27 „ 28	9	
„ 28 „ 29		
„ 29 „ 30		
„ 30 „ 31	8	
„ 31 „ 32	7	
„ 32 „ 33	6	
„ 33 „ 34	5	
„ 34 „ 35	4	
„ 35 „ 36	3	
„ 36 „ 37	2	
„ 37 and upwards.	1	

measure, the effect of which would be to make this country permanently dependent upon foreign countries for any very considerable portion of its supplies of grain. That it might be for a series of years dependent on foreign countries for a portion of its supply—that in many years of scarcity a considerable portion must be derived from abroad, I do not deny; but I nevertheless do not abandon the hope that this country, in the average of years, may produce a sufficiency for its own necessities. If that hope be disappointed;—if you must resort to other countries, in ordinary seasons, for periodical additions to your own regular supplies;—if this is to be, *then do I draw a material distinction* between the supply that is limited —the supply that is brought to repair our *accidental* and *slight* deficiency, *and the supply which is of a more permanent, ay, and more extensive character.*"

Sir Robert concluded his clear and business-like statement with the expression of an earnest hope, that, whatever might be the fate of his own proposition, the discussion might at all events lead to some conclusion satisfactory to the nation, and permanent because satisfactory. This was a very vain hope. Upon the subject of corn-laws, parties were then in that state when attempts at compromise cannot possibly be successful. By the Whig party, who had committed themselves to a fixed duty, it was condemned because it was not fixed. By the partisans of the Anti Corn-law League within the House, the ministers' relaxed scale was only held to be a trifling instalment of a large demand; and by the unscrupulous sticklers for high rents, any relaxation, however small, was viewed with dread and hatred. Hence, against Sir Robert's moderate and cautious proposition, a very strong

phalanx was marshalled; and no means were left untried to damage it in popular estimation.

As is usual when men's passions are excited, every section of opinion determined to have a debate upon its own particular views;—and a race took place, where every man started his crotchet, much as horses are started for the St Leger or Derby stakes. Lord John Russell took the lead in this race by moving an amendment upon Sir Robert Peel's motion, to the effect, that "This House, considering the evils that have been caused by the present corn-laws, and especially by the fluctuations of the graduated or sliding scale, is not prepared to adopt the measure of her Majesty's government, which is founded upon the same principles, and is likely to be attended by similar results." This amendment was very astutely phrased so as to admit of the votes of the opponents of all duties; for whilst it condemned the sliding scale, it cunningly avoided affirming the fixed duty principle. The debate upon it lasted four nights, and was merely a repetition of the well known arguments for and against protection to the British cultivator. On a division, there appeared for the ministerial scheme 349; for the amendment 226; giving a majority of 123 to the government. This division really settled the question for that time; but the opponents of ministers were resolved not so to give it up. Mr Villiers, who had entered a notice of motion for the immediate and total abolition of all duties on imported grain, persevered in it, notwithstanding the decisive nature of the division on Sir Robert Peel's sliding scale of duties.

This gave rise to a debate of five nights more, in the course of which, the mover, Mr Cobden, Mr Hawes, Mr Wakley, and other members, either directly or indirectly connected with the Anti Corn-law League, exhausted everything that could be alleged against the principle of protection to agriculture. The motion was negatived, of course, by an overwhelming majority; 90 only voting for it, whilst 393 voted against it.

It was not to be concealed, however, that many of the speeches delivered by the partisans of free-trade in grain made a deep impression, especially amongst the mercantile classes, who, not understanding the real cause of the stagnation of trade, began now to be persuaded that it was to be sought for in the corn-laws. Whilst the apostles of free-trade were thus exerting all their energies against protection in any shape, the advocates of high prices were not idle in their vocation. On the 25th February, the bill having gone into committee, one of the members for Lincolnshire, Mr Christopher, moved a new scale of duties in opposition to that of Sir Robert Peel, beginning with a duty of 25s. when wheat was 50s. *per quarter*, and diminishing, shilling by shilling, until the price rose to 73s., when a duty of 1s. *per quarter* was to remain. This amendment was negatived by 306 to 104.

Various other modifications having been proposed and put aside without dividing the House; at length the 8th March having been moved for the second reading of the bill, Lord Ebrington moved as an amendment, "that it be read this day six months;"

and the House having divided, the second reading was carried by 284 against 176, which gave Sir Robert a majority of 108. After this, opposition was evidently both useless and vexatious; and the bill having quickly passed the House of Commons, was affirmed by the Lords, after an amendment by Lord Melbourne, similar to that of Lord John Russell, had been moved and lost, and thus for a brief space became the law of the land.

Thus far, although Sir Robert Peel's commercial policy had not pleased either extremes,—and had been stigmatized by landlords as a blow struck at agriculture, and by the more unscrupulous free-traders as a masked monopoly,—it had not shaken the confidence of the great majority of the Conservative party. All men capable of thought saw that, with the lowered scale of prices for all other commodities which had obtained after 1815, and more especially after 1819, it would be in vain to attempt to establish an average for wheat of 60s. the quarter. With regard, however, to the tariff generally, the Peel party were in a different position. With respect to it, expectation had been silent; nor was any very sweeping change in its enactments looked for by the public at large, nor by any party. Before he came to the important question of the tariff, however, the yet more vital question of the finances was to be dealt with; to this the Premier now applied himself.

National finance is a question to which few men care to apply their minds, so repulsive is it to the majority; but as to the financial course now to be

taken, there existed little difference of opinion. All thinking men, in fact, had confidently anticipated the proposal of an income-tax. The experience of the last years of Lord Melbourne's administration had taught the public that indirect taxation had now seen its limit. The addition of five per cent. all round had failed; and it was well known that the moneyed interest, alarmed at the awkward position of the exchequer, and knowing that, if it continued much longer, a financial hitch must ensue, were determined not to allow any theoretical experiments to be tried upon the revenue. The only course remaining for the Cabinet to pursue was, therefore, to pass an income-tax of some kind or other. Of loans in a time of peace they naturally would not hear in the city nor upon the Stock Exchange. How should they? when by them, of all mankind, any renewal of the borrowing and funding system was most deeply to be deprecated, be the exigence what it might. It was—and is—well understood by the leaders of this great and now all-powerful interest, that a return to the system of a series of loans, under whatever circumstances, must of necessity involve a return to the paper-system of 1797, and a repeal, or else unconditional suspension, of the money-law of 1819; and this is the last thing to which, after the enormous gains accruing from its enactment and the struggles to maintain it in spite of all consequences, this great interest can be expected to listen. An income-tax was consequently, under these circumstances, the only alternative; and it was at once adopted, as it was sure to be.

The Premier brought before the House his financial statement of ways and means on the 11th March, after a method the perspicuity and clearness of which can scarcely be exaggerated. He himself was accused, by some of the speakers who followed him, of exaggerating the exigence upon which he grounded his assertion of the necessity of an income-tax for three years; but few, who will take the trouble to go through the details, will be inclined to deny that the right honourable baronet made out an ample necessity for decided measures.* His exhibition of the *deficit* which, during six years, had been growing like a cancer in the heart of the revenue, was not to be gainsaid in any way. It was quite undeniable. It was gradual, increasing from year to year, which is the surest symptom of mortal disease in the body-politic, as well as in the natural body. He demonstrated by figures,

* An Account of the Deficiency of the Income of the United Kingdom, for the Years ending 5th January and 5th April 1838, 1839, 1840, and 1841; with the Estimated Amount of Deficiency for the Year ending 5th January and 5th April 1842.

Years.	Ending January 5th.	Ending April 5th.
	£	£
1838	655,760	1,428,534
1839	345,228	430,325
1840	1,512,792	1,457,223
1841	1,595,970	1,851,997
1842	2,101,369	2,334,559
	6,209,119	7,502,638
	Certain deficit, 1843	2,570,000
		£10,072,638

just as certain, that the *maximum* of indirect taxation was then reached; and that to accumulate the already unbearable load of imports upon the necessaries or even luxuries of life, would be ruinous as well as futile.* The results from these figures must be admitted to prove, beyond the possibility of doubt, that indirect taxing could not then be carried further. The conclusion, therefore, is, that nothing but a direct tax upon income could be relied upon to fill up the *hiatus* in the exchequer; nor were the leaders of the moneyed interest willing to rely upon anything else.

* Mr Baring's "Anticipation of the Increased Revenue to be derived from the Taxes imposed in 1840" is as follows. Mr Baring imposed his *five per cent.* duty on customs and excise, and *ten per cent.* on assessed taxes, in May 1840.

The net produce (after deducting drawbacks and repayments) of the customs and excise, in the year ending January 5, 1840, was,	£37,911,506
The estimated produce of the customs and excise, with the additional *five per cent.*, was,	1,895,575
Giving for the year ending January 5, 1842,	39,807,081
The actual produce for that year was,	38,118,221
The actual increase was,	£206,715

Being not *five per cent.*, but a little more than *a half per cent.*

The actual produce of the assessed taxes, with the 10 per cent. added, for the year ending January 5, 1842, was,	£3,069,947
The net produce for the year ending January 5, 1840, was,	2,758,590
Increase (being about 11¼ per cent.)	£311,357

In this latter case Mr Baring's screw could not be avoided; and being used with vigour, the result exceeded the estimate.

They were too wise in their generation to heed much the extravagant and ill-founded anticipations of the free-traders, who confidently predicted that three years would be the limit of the existence of the burden, if their doctrines were carried out and to any extent.

Whether the Prime-minister shared at all in this delusion, it is impossible to say; but the probability is, he threw out his relaxation of the tariff as "a tub to a whale," to facilitate the passage of the income-tax. This impost, as proposed by Sir Robert, was one of *sevenpence in the pound*, which is a fraction under *three per cent.*, a feature far less objectionable than the mode in which it is levied. It may safely be asserted that the income-tax, as imposed in England first by Mr Pitt and lastly by Sir Robert Peel, is one of the most unjust taxes ever submitted to by a nation of men who boast of their freedom and love of equity in the same breath. During the discussions which ensued after the proposition was made, one portion of this injustice was sufficiently exposed. The utter unfairness of taxing at an equal rate the income derived from actual possessions in land, houses, or money, with that derived partly from exertion and partly from capital, as mercantile incomes are, and with that derived wholly from personal exertion, as are those of the lawyer and physician, was seen and laid bare. If the first paid *three per cent.*, it was clear enough that *two per cent.* was enough for the second, and *one per cent.* enough for the last to pay. This would have been substantially though not fractionally just, and this is the utmost that can be said of any impost; for

no tax was ever yet devised which fell upon all who paid it with an equality of pressure.*

But the want of this description of graduation was not the worst part of this confiscating impost; and strange to say, this, the most monstrous feature of the proposed levy, was never once touched in the debates upon it, or hardly so. The most unjust provision of the income-tax is, that it levies upon the income, barely sufficient to procure for its recipient the common necessaries of life, the same per centage as is levied upon incomes the superfluity of which is plainly immense. What can be more unfair than to tax, at the same rate, the man of one hundred pounds, and the man of one hundred thousand pounds, per annum? Yet this Mr Pitt's and Sir Robert Peel's income-tax does. It is mere trifling to argue, as some do, that no one can say precisely where this superfluity begins. No one can point out the mathematical line where England ends and where Scotland begins; but does any one doubt, on that account, whether there be such a country as Scotland? Unless, then, "superfluity" be

* In the case of a merchant, it would not have been unfair to have supposed his capital invested in the funds, and to have taxed at *three per cent.* such amount of his income as it would have yielded, if so invested, the remainder of his income being attributed to personal exertion, and dealt with accordingly. In the case of a lawyer, author, or medical man, it would have not been inequitable to value his average income as an annuity according to his expectation of life, to have supposed the amount of that valuation invested in the funds, and have taxed him at the rate of *three per cent.* upon such annual income as the funds would have yielded from such amount so invested. This would have been as near equity as taxes ever are.

itself a superfluous word, it is unquestionable that superfluity has an existence, and it would not be difficult to come to an equitable limit, where one should be supposed to end; that is to say, the amount sufficient for necessaries, and the other to commence, and to fix some scale of increase, substantially just, to operate as the superfluity grew and extended. This cannot certainly be done with fractional minuteness of justice; but it might easily be done with sufficient equity to make an income-tax as fair as any other, and this is all that common sense requires.

Sir Robert, doubtless, knew that a doubly graduated tax of this sort would never be voted by an assembly composed exclusively of rich men; but it is curious to see the justice of such a scale not recognised by an English House of Commons, and yet acknowledged and acted upon by a king of Denmark. An income-tax, however, the moneyed interest was determined to have of some sort or other; and the income-tax, as proposed by the Premier, was carried by large majorities accordingly. Thus far all went smoothly; but there were other interests, whom the minister deemed it advisable to conciliate as well as those of the capitalists; and out of this arose the first symptoms of distrust of Sir Robert Peel by his high Conservative friends.

Sir Robert Peel brought forward his scheme for a recasting of the tariff, and a sweeping alteration of the provisions of the Customs Acts, on the 10th of May 1842. The Premier's proposals were embodied in one of those speeches of studied adroitness, of which he was so great a master. To examine Sir

Robert's plan in detail would be a very superfluous labour. Suffice it to say that, in constructing the amended tariff, the Premier abandoned the duties levied on a great number of minor articles, coming principally under the head of drugs and dye-woods, and diminished the duties on a great many other articles of import. The portion of the measure that alarmed the high Tory section of Sir Robert's friends was, however, the alteration of the prohibitory duties on live cattle, sheep, and swine, and on salted and dried meats, and butter, eggs, cheese, and lard, and the substitution of a very moderate duty upon these articles. This caused great uneasiness, and roused a considerable spirit of resistance amongst the protectionists of the House; but as in proportion to the opposition shown by this section of the adherents of government, the Economists gave their support to the innovating minister, all the enumerated articles were inserted, as proposed, by large majorities.

If, however, the measures of Sir Robert now began to excite deep apprehension amongst his older partisans, they were still more deeply scandalized by the language he employed in advocating them, and the rapturous and tumultuous applause with which these expressions were received by the whole nearly of the Opposition benches.

"I deeply regret (concluded Sir Robert Peel, after going through the details of his tariff) that the tariff proposed by her Majesty's government should have had undue advantage taken of it by pretended sympathizers with the supposed sufferers, to raise a panic relating to it. I have a sincere and cordial

respect for the interests which apprehend that they will be affected by it, and I have therefore felt it to be my duty to enter into these details. Subsequent consideration and free communication with all parties have confirmed the government in the opinion, that these measures will be attended by great public advantage—that they will produce general advantage to all classes, not excluding the agricultural classes, by the reduction which we propose to make in foreign meat and cattle; and, above all, by the removal of that complete prohibition which we found when we approached the subject. Not wishing to enter upon a question which has been adopted by parliament—I mean the question of the corn-laws—wishing to postpone the question of sugar till the alteration, of which the noble lord has given notice, comes to be discussed—not wishing to prejudice that question by an imperfect reference to it—I have fulfilled the purpose for which I rose, viz., to state the general scope and object of the commercial arrangements proposed by her Majesty's government, and to vindicate those parts that seemed most open to animadversion. I know that many gentlemen, who are strong advocates for free-trade, may consider that I have not gone far enough. I know that. (Hear! hear! hear!) I believe that, on the general principle of free-trade, there is now *no great difference of opinion; and that all agree in the general rule that* 'WE SHOULD PURCHASE IN THE CHEAPEST MARKET, AND SELL IN THE DEAREST.' (*Rapturous cheers from the Economists and Opposition generally.*) I know the meaning of these cheers. I do not now wish to raise a discussion on the corn-laws or the sugar-duties, which (I contend) are exceptions from the general rule. (Hear, hear, hear!) I have stated the reasons, on more than one occasion, why I so considered them, and I will not review that question now. I know that I may be met with the complaints of the gentlemen opposite, of the limited extent to which I now apply the principle to which I have adverted, to these important articles. But I felt satisfied that it was inexpedient to apply

such important changes, as I have heard suggested, to those important interests. I thought (after the best consideration I could give the matter) that, if I proposed a greater change, I should only aggravate the present distresses of the country, and increase the alarm that prevails amongst these important classes. I think, on the whole, I have proposed, and the legislature has sanctioned, as great a change as was just or prudent, considering the existing engagements between landlord and tenant, and the large amount of capital at present applied to the cultivation of the soil. Under all these circumstances, I think we have made as great a change as was consistent with those circumstances, and the nature and position of the subject with which we had to deal."

That the arguments of the apostles of free-trade had made a deep impression upon the mind of the minister was very evident from both the tone and substance of this address. With a population then increasing at the morbid rate of about a million in the short space of three years, he had manifestly become penetrated by the conviction that to find employment for the numbers that might in no long time demand it, and in a way not to be resisted, some large extension of foreign trade must be in some way created; and there is reason to believe that Sir Robert might possibly have arrived also at the conviction that restrictions upon the importation of food, especially wheat and animal food of every description, were the very means of adding to the evils which he deprecated.*

* The author may be allowed to say—at all events he does say—that, having in 1841 published the first edition of his "True Law of Population," he transmitted copies to Sir Robert Peel and to Sir James Graham, accompanied by a note strongly urging both not to

But the language used by the Premier on this occasion goes beyond a mere justification of particular relaxations. He admits, almost or entirely without reservation the doctrine of the free-traders, making corn and sugar exceptions to a rule, but omitting the difficulty of exhibiting any grounds for such exception that would not apply just as well to other articles. It is curious to see Sir Robert Peel, and many others equally well read, alluding, as if it were some profound modern economical discovery, to a maxim so trite as to have existed at the time when Carthage flourished as a great commercial state; but curious or not, from that hour his political position was changed.†

The more firm of his Conservative supporters now began to distrust their leader in the House of Commons, and, taught by the experience of 1829, to dread secretly an eventual abandonment of that for which they contended. They could not now, however, improve their position. Without Sir Robert

neglect the statements there embodied, although the name of the author might never have been heard by either. Both ministers acknowledged their receipt of the volume. The measures of Sir Robert as to the import of live cattle, salted meats, cheese, butter, lard, and grain, were precisely such as, upon his own principles, the author would have recommended.

† It is recorded somewhere that a Carthaginian cynic, determined to reprove his fellow-citizens for their cupidity and prostration before the love of pelf, proclaimed, that if they would meet him, he would reveal to every man his secret thoughts. This proclamation having naturally drawn together a large crowd, the bitter old wag dismissed them with one sentence, "You are all thinking how to buy in the cheapest, and sell in the dearest market."

Peel, the formation of any administration, capable of resisting the influence of the apostles of free-trade, was a mere chimera. All that remained in their power, therefore, was to endeavour to delay, as long as possible, that which they began to fear could not eventually be resisted; and to leave to the chapter of accidents the possible defeat of a combination which it seemed hopeless, by any stroke of policy on their part, finally to repulse or to disperse. The tariff, accordingly, after various futile attempts to modify those clauses which were most objectionable in the eyes of the high Conservative members, was carried through the House and passed by overwhelming majorities; the Economists and Free-traders voting with the minister on every occasion where he was opposed by members of the party who brought him into power.

By means of the same combination of parties, the amended poor-law, with its board of irresponsible commissioners, holding a delegated power illegally given by persons whose own powers are only delegated powers, was continued for ten years more, in spite of the shocking exposures frequently occurring of its atrocious operation, and of the intense disgust which it had excited in the breast of every humane and right-minded man throughout England. Every resistance was made to it by the excellent John Fielden and his colleague General Johnson, members for Oldham, aided by Mr Ferrand, Conservative member for Knaresborough, but in vain. The Free-traders and Economists invariably voted with the more slavish adherents of the minister, who was now palpably

becoming more and more entangled by them; and symptoms of a breach between the more consistent Conservatives and that section who have since held a singular position (something like that of the bat), under the title of "Peelites," began even now to be seen by close observers.

The opposition to this act, made however by men principally whose thorough honesty and constitutional knowledge could not be doubted, produced a great effect upon the country; and more especially upon those without whose connivance it could not be worked,—that is to say, the local boards of guardians. These bodies everywhere began to be deeply affected by the disclosures made in and out of parliament, of the inhumanities and immoralities transacted under the eyes of the creatures of the trio at Somerset-House. They felt, and properly and necessarily felt, their own characters involved; and encouraged everywhere by the aid of the people and of the better part of the press; and disliking, as most Englishmen yet fortunately do, the centralizing principle, they began to set at defiance the "ukases" of the Central Board, who, knowing their own deep unpopularity, dared not resist, nor put in force any of the arbitrary powers with which the act had armed them. Thus, the teeth of the act which, in its working, really rested upon the slavish submission of the local boards to the revolting orders of the central despotism, began to be drawn, especially in the north of England, where it was disliked from the first; and out-door relief, which it was the primary object of the disciples of Malthus to discontinue, and

which the widely spread distress made more than ever necessary, became again universal.

These were the principal measures of the session, which was prorogued on the 12th August. During its continuance committees had been sitting to inquire into the particulars, though not the causes, of the pressure on the country, and to inquire also into the provisions of the different Bank Acts. By the first a huge mass of evidence was got together which very amply proved that which nobody now pretended to doubt, viz. that the United Kingdom was suffering from end to end. But from alluding to the deeper causes of all this suffering the members of this committee very religiously abstained. Their report, therefore, excepting its corroboration of the existence of a state of things which had been long notorious, was a mere nullity. The reports of the committee on banking, which had been appointed after Sir Robert Peel's accession to office in 1841, contained evidence both more curious, interesting, and important; but as the strange measure to which they gave birth was not brought forth until 1844, any farther allusion to it, in this place, would be premature. Abroad, affairs were in a somewhat less critical state. The disaster in Affghanistan was boldly retrieved. The Emperor of China was, somewhat rudely and not very justly, awakened from that dream of self-conceit into which he was daily flattered by some three hundred millions of human cyphers; and in North America the boundary-dispute was hushed up by means of a treaty, generally known by the Palmerstonian *soubriquet* of

the "Ashburton Capitulation." In France great irritation still existed. The audacious expedition to Syria, which the skill and energy of Napier and the calm daring of Stopford, had, in spite of French threats, brought to a sudden and successful termination, had totally alienated the grasping Louis Philippe and his ministers; and, in revenge, they were now about to destroy, for the second time, British influence in Spain, and derisively to overset that mockery of a constitution, which the Spaniard, wedded to old forms, and having the essence without the parade of freedom, laughed at or cursed, as his humour might incline.

The parliamentary session of 1843 was comparatively unimportant. Much time was taken up by fruitless endeavours to heal that religious feud which, ultimately, upon a matter of discipline and not of doctrine, ended in an entire disruption of the Scottish Kirk as established by law, and in the erection of a "Free Church," dependent upon voluntary subscriptions for the stipends of its ministers, and the expenses of its places of worship and minor functionaries. The question also of national education gave rise to those long and fruitless discussions, or rather bickerings, which must always and invariably end in disappointment, if religious tutelage is permitted, however slightly, to be mixed with secular education. This is so self-evident, and has been, besides, so fully demonstrated by experience, that the wonder is to see rational persons attempting to found a national measure upon a sectarian basis, which, of course, is

the real state of the case wherever one system of religion appears to be inculcated, however slightly, in preference to other rival systems. Even under the national system of the United States, in the schools of which the Scriptures, without note or comment, are merely read at certain times, much complaint is excited amongst the Roman-catholic portion of the population, who urge that by this their children, to whom the promiscuous perusal of the sacred writings is forbidden, are thus deprived of the benefit of these schools. Nor is this complaint altogether destitute of foundation. Having gone so far as to exclude the teaching of all peculiar forms of religion, it is not easy to say why religious tuition should not be left to the parents and to the ministers ordained for that especial purpose. We do not quarrel with our music-masters because with Mozart and Rossini they do not teach Tate and Brady; nor with our drawing-masters because they do not take their compositions from scriptural scenes, stories, or persons. Why then insist upon mixing theological tenets, which are totally apart, with the merely secular knowledge of the reading made easy, the grammar, or the multiplication table? In this quest the failure of Sir Robert Peel is not more wonderful than the failure of all similar experiments, whether before or since.

If, however, much of the session was passed in these unprofitable attempts to make "bricks without straw" or "twine ropes of sand," some of the scenes transacted in the sister country amply made up in interest for the wearisomeness of some of these parliamentary details.

During the period through which the administration of Lord Melbourne "dragged its slow length along," Mr O'Connell, having made terms with the ministry, contented himself with a quiet system of "sap and mine," directed principally against the Established Church in Ireland. He had indeed set on foot a combination, under the title of "the Precursor Society," where a repeal of the Act of Union with Ireland was talked about, and where certain statistics bearing upon the question were collected; but this was rather a show of agitation than its reality, and the repeal-question was all the time truly in abeyance, whilst excitement was kept alive by the diminution of the number of Irish bishoprics and the appropriation-clause.

When Sir Robert Peel assumed the reins of political power, this mitigated plan would not longer serve Mr O'Connell's purpose. To the very name of Peel he had vowed an eternal hatred. His war with Sir Robert was never to cease. With him he knew he could not expect to have, nor would be suffered to have, any compromise; and hence he felt that he was now tied to the stake and must play out the game which, peradventure, in a rash hour he had commenced, forgetful of the strangeness of political vicissitudes, and relying, probably, on the apparent chances at one time against the accession to power of a conservative government led by Sir Robert Peel. That Mr O'Connell felt that in such an event he would be forced to play an unequal and desperate game seems likely, when the extreme anger which he exhibited against those more extreme politicians who, in Eng-

land, had assisted to ruin the *prestige* of the Whig administration, is considered. When talking of "Chartism," he forgot all his maxims of peaceful agitation and moral persuasion, and offered one hundred thousand Irishmen to put down by force and arms a party whom he roundly accused of meditated treason and insurrection,—nay of actual treason. Yet, strange to say, the very man who indulged in all this violence was amongst the first to sign that document from which "Chartism" took its name; doing this, of course, when the movement seemed little likely to attain the importance that it afterwards assumed. Sir Robert Peel, however, was now Premier; and with him and his government the great agitator could neither have peace nor truce. He was now "to set his life upon a cast," and "to stand the hazard of the die!" The repeal of the Union was now to be struggled for in earnest; and, probably from the first, he was convinced that the struggle was all but hopeless. He must now indeed have felt himself in the desperate position of Shakspeare's Macbeth when he exclaims,—

> "There is no flying hence, nor tarrying here."

After the resignation of the Melbourne ministry, Mr O'Connell accordingly dissolved the "Precursor Society" and set on foot "the Repeal Association;"—(a combination for the specific purpose of obtaining a repeal of the Act of Union—) which spread its ramifications with vast rapidity over the greater part of Ireland. In point of organization this association

was admirably planned. The country was divided into districts and sub-districts, and over each district presided a person under the title of "Repeal Warden," through whom information was transmitted; funds got together; newspapers set up and patronized by the association, circulated; and, when necessary, meetings called, preparatory to the greater district meetings which took place from time to time. It is not easy to conceive what Mr O'Connell and those in his confidence really expected from the extraordinary agitation then set on foot; but, perhaps, the most probable guess is, that they hoped, by bringing the country to the very verge of insurrection, to intimidate the ministry into some compromise, which might enable O'Connell to take fresh ground for a renewed assault on the Church and the power of the English landlords, who possess the greater portion of the soil of Ireland.

Be this as it may, it is certain that the Irish agitation of 1843 was one of the most formidable on record, whether we consider the extreme danger of the steps taken, or the ability with which an excitable people were roused almost to madness and brought to the very brink of rebellion, without actual insurrection ensuing. In no other country, probably, could such a combination have existed, without an ultimate rising being the consequence; and this unquestionably would have been the event in the south of Ireland in 1843, but for the wonderful influence of the Catholic priesthood, who, with Mr O'Connell himself, were well convinced that force would have been inevitably put down by force. It cannot be denied that the in-

centives to an armed rising scattered at this time, amongst an excitable people like the Irish, full of talent and genius as some of them must be in candour admitted to be, were almost irresistible; and the wonder is, how they ever were resisted.*

Alarming, however, as the state of Ireland appeared to all at this moment, a calm review of the circumstances will convince most that revolution was the farthest thing from Mr O'Connell's thought, and this Sir Robert Peel doubtless perceived. O'Connell saw,—and Sir Robert Peel saw—that the position of both was very different from that in which they stood in the year 1829. On the Catholic question Mr O'Connell had with him the Whig party generally, some Tories, and most of the advocates of radical reform; and it was further tolerably evident that Mr Peel himself, from the period of his Irish secretaryship, had doubted the power of continuing much longer the system of penal laws against Roman-catholics. But, in 1843, Mr O'Connell had no British party. In his struggle for a Repeal of the Union, the only persons likely to have sympathized

* In the repeal newspaper, entitled "*The Nation*," conducted and principally written by Mr Duffy, both prose and verse writing of admirable talent frequently appeared. The lines, especially, which commence—

"Who fears to speak of '98?
Who blushes at the name?"

may, in energy and depth of pathos, vie with most of the beautiful and affecting lyrics—exquisite as many of them are—which unhappy Ireland has produced. The poetry of *the Nation* has been collected in a small volume, which will be admired when the unhappy circumstances under which it was composed shall be forgotten.

with him were the advocates of the Charter; but of this sympathy the consequences of the compact made with Lord Melbourne, at Lichfield House, had deprived him. In his rage, on their desertion of the Whigs, he had totally alienated them; and from no other class of politicians had he anything to hope. Most men believed that a Repeal of the Union would be synonymous with total separation, and nobody doubted that, at all events, it would include, of course, the downfal of the Irish Established Church, the re-establishment of Popery; and a series of laws against absentees, of a nature stringent enough to compel the English holders of land in Ireland either to sell it, or to become residents with their families, and to form an integral portion of the Irish nation. For this the British public was by no means prepared, and Mr O'Connell knew it. He must therefore have known that to carry Repeal was impossible; and as he likewise felt rebellion to be hopeless, the only conclusion is, that either he trusted to drive Sir Robert Peel from power by the alarm he was creating, or else to extort from him some compromise, which might change his own false position for a better one. He failed in both; and, in the end, Sir Robert Peel may be said to have been his destroyer; but nothing of energy was wanting, on the part of the great agitator, in the pursuit of his object, whatever that was.

The mode of action adopted by the Irish repealers, on this occasion, was, after having organized the country, to call together enormous gatherings of the

people, called "monster meetings" — these assemblages, where it was possible, being got together upon localities noted in some historic tale, as being scenes of transactions great in Irish annals and legends, such as the Hill of Tara and the Field of Clontarf. The language made use of at these gatherings was of the most exciting description, and resolutions, expressive of the determination of the Irish nation to repudiate the Act of Union, were passed, amidst acclamations that, to the distant ear, came "as the sound of seas;" but no one ventured to name petitioning the United Parliament. This Mr O'Connell, under a show of legality, very adroitly and studiously evaded. He held that a parliament was a Saxon Wittenagemote, or great council merely, whose function it was to advise with and legislate with the crown; and that to call a parliament was a part of the prerogative of the crown. From this doctrine flowed one conclusion, and this was, that the Queen *might*, at will, issue writs to the Irish counties and boroughs, calling a parliament for Ireland to sit in Dublin, whither the Irish Peers were of course to be summoned; and with this came a corollary, to the effect that the Act of Union itself, by interfering with the royal prerogative in this respect, was an unconstitutional act, which neither Irish nor English parliament had a right to pass.

Such was the doctrine laid down at the monster meetings of this period; but, above all, nothing was left unsaid or undone to impress upon the Peel cabinet that Ireland was on the very verge and brink of convulsion

and ultimate revolution. It had always been objected, by the opposers of the Union, that the parliament of Ireland had no right to pass an act to annihilate itself; and hence, excepting the royal dominion over Ireland, which all admitted, the legislation of the United Parliament was tacitly disallowed, when employed to deal with Irish affairs. Still, however, nothing was done to impugn or gainsay the authority of the crown itself. The repealers of 1843, however, did not stop short of this in act, though in words they professed the utmost loyalty to the house of Hanover. Besides the scheme of a parliament of delegates to sit at Dublin, Mr O'Connell proposed a plan of courts of arbitration, composed of repealers, who were to settle disputes and differences, and thus supersede, as far as possible, the justice of peace and petty sessions. The arm most relied on was, however, the terror inspired by the monster meetings, at some of which language of a most extraordinary kind was used by Mr O'Connell and his associates. He exhorted his hearers to "die freemen rather than live as slaves," and confidently anticipating that an Irish parliament "should sit at College Green before twelve months were over," added that, within that period, "he would himself be free or in his grave!" The year 1843 he styled "the repeal year," and talked of the organization of the Repeal Association as being now irresistible.

Whilst the general opinion everywhere, accordingly, was that Ireland was now on the eve of a terrible convulsion, men were astounded by the calm apathy

with which all this agitation seemed to be viewed by the Premier and his cabinet. Meetings after meetings were held, preceded or succeeded by banquets, at which the most extraordinary announcements were made; yet the British ministers seemed quite unmoved, and as if unwilling to interfere. The tone taken by the repeal press was as daring as that of the addresses made to the multitudes who composed the monster assemblages. Mr O'Connell was called "the uncrowned king," and defiance after defiance was hurled in the teeth of the Peel ministry, who were assumed to be the bitter enemies of Ireland. In fact, the attitude assumed in "the sister Isle," and the apparent apathy of the British ruling powers, excited the astonishment of all Europe, being construed into certainty of success on one hand, and into fear on the other.

But Sir Robert Peel, whose judgment of mankind was almost infallible, knew well the game he meant to play, and let the agitation go on, as if he too were stunned by its uproar. The truth was, the Premier knew right well that insurrection was not intended by Mr O'Connell and the Catholic priesthood, by whom he was zealously aided, though intimidation was; and feigning to be intimidated, he suffered the repealers to proceed, step by step, until a colourable case, on which to found a legal prosecution, should be created by their want of caution and over-confidence in their own game. This, accordingly, after many months of violent and vehement movement on the part of the repealers, was at length effected, and the blow was suddenly, but coolly and resolutely, struck.

On the 8th October, a monster meeting had been summoned to assemble at Clontarf, a spot famous in Irish story as the battle-field of a victory over the Danes. This meeting was expected to be one of the most important of the whole series, Clontarf being near to Dublin; and the preparations for holding it were of a corresponding character. These preparations went on undisturbed until the 7th October, the day before the intended meeting, when, to the utter consternation of all engaged in this high game of agitation, a proclamation appeared, emanating from the Lord-lieutenant and council of Ireland, stigmatizing the intended assemblage as the work of factious and seditious men, and warning all well-disposed persons not to attend it.

This blow was a mortal one. Mr O'Connell felt he was stopped, and at a moment when such a stoppage was most fatal; that is to say, just at the point when some sort of success seemed likely to crown his agitation. The repealers did not dare to risk a collision with the government; and, not daring this, they chose the only decent course that remained open to them, and issued placards countermanding the meeting.

On being thus unceremoniously checkmated, Mr O'Connell's tone was the reverse of politic. He characterized the measure as base and imbecile; and added, that the meeting at Clontarf was intended to be the last of the series, and that the forbidding it on the part of the Lord-lieutenant was an act of supererogation. This sort of language was ill judged. To complain, to whimper, and to whine, in such cases,

only still more lowers the position of the beaten gamester.

Sir Robert Peel having thus turned the agitator's position, lost no time in completing his victory; and on the 14th of October Mr O'Connell and eight of his more confidential associates, including one of his sons, Mr John O'Connell, were arrested and held to bail, on charges of conspiracy, unlawfully assembling, and sedition. To enter into any detail of the tedious law-proceedings which followed would be useless. The result was, that Mr O'Connell and his companions were all found guilty on some of the counts of the indictment, and sentenced to suffer various terms of imprisonment, and to be fined various sums, after which they were to give securities for keeping the peace for a term of years. Mr O'Connell himself was fined £2000, and imprisoned for twelve months; after which he was to be bound for £5000, with two sureties of £2500 each, to keep the peace for seven years. A decision of the House of Lords, as to some irregularity connected with the array of jurymen from which the jury was struck, altered these sentences somewhat; but the effect upon the agitators of this result was not in the least changed by it. It was, in fact, a fatal blow to Mr O'Connell; nor did he ever recover from it. From the first, the game he attempted was ill judged, false in calculation, and desperate, especially against a minister like Sir Robert Peel, whose knowledge of mankind was unrivalled; and it failed accordingly. In such cases, however, failure is total ruin. "From the sublime to the ridiculous is only one step;" and it is

not only a fatal step, but one which cannot be retraced. Mr O'Connell had for many months acted the autocrat in Ireland. On one occasion he had foolishly suffered a sort of mock coronation to take place; and now Sir Robert Peel had so managed as to destroy this baseless dream of empire by the unromantic and ludicrous instrumentality of an attorney. In all such affairs, to be ridiculous is worse than to be unfortunate. A man may be respectable even upon a scaffold; but no man can be so in a penitentiary, to which the pseudo-king of Ireland was now consigned.

Mr O'Connell survived his defeat about three years, but only as a sort of melancholy and wandering ghost of his former self. After this, to face Sir Robert Peel in the British House of Commons must have been worse than death to one who, to great faults of character, unquestionably joined great talents, vast energy, and a love of country which, though he failed miserably at last in his designs, must not be denied him. From their first entrance into public life, he had been the bitter antagonist of Peel; but in Sir Robert he met an adversary superior to himself both in knowledge of mankind and command of temper, and, as usual, fortune sided with the cooler player. Of this apparently tremendous agitation nothing remains that any man cares to know or to think of, save some of those touching lyrics which seem to be the sole consolation of Ireland in all her misfortunes, long and cruel as her season of suffering has been!

The events of the session of 1843, though not unimportant, were cast into the shade by the interest

excited by the Irish agitation. The Anti Corn-law League, unwearied in exertion, and unabashed by defeats, again, through their intrepid champion, Mr Villiers, forced the subject of total repeal upon the House of Commons, again to be worsted by an overwhelming majority. Much time was also spent in demonstrating that which no man in his senses denied, the distress of the country.*

It is probable, however, that the excitement and anxiety arising out of Mr O'Connell's agitation for the repeal of the Union, postponed, until 1844, another measure, the most important of that year, and which had been in preparation from the time of Sir Robert Peel's accession to power in 1841. This measure was the Banking-act of 1844, which was recommended to the attention of the House of Commons in the speech from the throne on the opening

* The following tabular statement, quoted by Mr Ferrand in his speech on the distressed and depressed state of the country, does not need any comment to explain it.

WAGES TABLE.

	1800.	1810.	1820.	1830.	1840.	1842.
Price of Wheat per quarter.....	£ s. d. 5 13 7	£ s. d. 5 6 2	£ s. d. 3 7 11	£ s. d. 3 4 3	£ s. d. 3 6 4	£ s. d. 2 5 0
Handloom Weavers. Age.						
John Wilson..... 75	0 15 0	0 16 0	0 16 0	0 16 0	0 8 0	0 6 0
John Whitaker..... 65	0 15 0	0 17 0	1 0 0	0 15 0	0 8 0	0 6 0
Jonas Crowther..... 52	.....	1 0 0	1 1 0	0 16 0	0 9 0	0 7 0
John Ward..... 39	.....	.....	0 19 0	0 15 0	0 7 0	0 6 0
Lot Bragshaw..... 71	0 18 0	0 17 0	0 18 0	0 16 0	0 5 0	0 6 0
Coombers' Wages.						
Joshua Smith..... 64	1 1 0	0 19 0	0 19 0	1 0 0	0 9 0	0 6 0
John Hill..... 62	.....	0 16 0	1 0 0	1 0 0	0 8 0	0 6 0
Thomas Bradley.... 29	.....	.....	.....	0 18 0	0 10 0	0 8 0
John Rhodes..... 49	.....	1 0 0	0 18 0	0 18 0	0 8 0	0 7 0
William Sedwick... 35	.....	.....	.....	.....	0 10 0	0 7 0
Prisoners in Wakefield House of Correction..	670	499	2169	2620	3565	4430

of the session of 1844. During the agitation and still-lingering pressure of the preceding year, the Premier might not have found it altogether an easy matter to persuade Parliament to embark in any fresh alterations of the laws regulating the currency. In the year 1844, however, one of those singular events, which occasionally for a time tend to alleviate the misery of a country suffering under the curse of mistaken legislation as to money, began to take place, and to be felt by the community as some renewal of former ease. This event was the great railway speculation-fever, which now had made considerable head, and which, amongst other consequences, was adding vastly to the quantity of money in circulation and to the demand for labour.

The railway system had been in partial operation for years, but hitherto the speculations in this direction had moved somewhat languidly. Reflecting men had viewed railroads, as constructed especially in this country, with a doubtful eye. Where *sixty to seventy per cent.* of the annual returns is swallowed up in working-expenses, and where much of the capital is borrowed, the margin for profit must be narrowed; and such was hitherto believed to be, and such really was nearly, the state of the case. The long stagnation under which the nation had writhed now, however, produced reaction. Capital cannot, and will not, remain inactive; and if profitable employment cannot, in the regular course, be found for it, fiction will be resorted to, and speculative gambling fill the place vacated by honest and ordinary dealing. Since 1839, a mortal languor had pervaded everything almost without a solitary

exception; and speculative capitalists, wearied of seeing their hoards lie idle, seized upon railways as a *dernier ressort* or forlorn hope. Every means of delusion was now resorted to in order to induce holders of money to invest in this direction. Fictitious profits and "cooked" balance-sheets were displayed and paid, until, in 1844, the *mania* for railroads was fast becoming an epidemic like the "South Sea Bubble," or the speculative madness of 1824 and 1825.

Sir Robert Peel seized the opportunity to renew those currency schemes which were the Cleopatra for which he lost the world; and as the Bank-charter was now about to expire, the royal speech recommended to the two Houses to take advantage of the occasion, and reconsider the system of banking generally, and especially as conducted by the directors of the Bank of England. The terrible jeopardy in which the Bank stood in October and November 1839 had undoubtedly deeply affected the mind of Sir Robert. As soon as he succeeded to power, he procured a committee of inquiry into the system of banking to be appointed; and this committee, having collected a good deal of evidence, some portions of which are both very curious and very instructive, made two reports. Through the uneasy years of 1842 and 1843, these reports lay unheeded upon the table of the House of Commons. The Prime-minister had at length, however, resolved to make them the basis of a measure, which has been, by one who well understood it—the late John Fielden, Esq., M.P. for Oldham—happily designated as "Peel's Bill the

Second." The period for the renewal of the charter of the Bank of England was the time for doing this, and to this, accordingly, Sir Robert Peel now applied himself.

If the events of the year 1844 could have been blotted from the British annals, the character of Sir Robert Peel, as a statesman, would unquestionably have stood with posterity much higher than it is ever likely to do. In the great measure, as he thought it, of the session of 1844, we see brought out the weakest portion of his mind, which was remarkable for cunning rather than strength—for minute observation rather than comprehensiveness of view. That the Mr Peel of 1819 should have been entangled in that series of miserable mistakes into which the Economist party, with all the rashness of conceit, and all the conceit of pseudo-science, precipitated themselves headlong, was not to be wondered at. He was yet a young man—a mere sciolist amidst the difficult questions with which he was then prompted to deal. But that, after the numberless exposures of the terrible effects of the blunders of 1819, which took place between that period and the year of our Lord 1844, he should have learnt so little from these exposures as to be tempted to try, as it were, to stereotype those errors, is really matter for astonishment. There cannot exist any doubt that Sir Robert perceived and traced to their source many of the pernicious and disgraceful consequences which followed the infatuated money legislation of the first-named period. He could not shut his eyes to its effects upon the domestic circumstances of the country, although he endeavoured to deceive himself and others by explain-

ing them away as far as a subtle logic might enable him to effect his purpose. Unable to muster resolution sufficient to enable him to inquire into and comprehend the full enormity of the blunder to which he was a party, and to which he rashly lent the sanction of his name, there was no other course but an attempt to explain away the consequences. Neither need there be any hesitation in asserting that Sir Robert Peel, in common with Mr Canning, Lord Palmerston, and every minister who has had to deal with the foreign relations of the country, felt deeply at times to what a serious extent these relations were endangered and complicated by the ever-recurring financial embarrassments and monetary reactions that followed the disastrous epoch of 1819.* This was particularly appa-

* The regularity with which every season of financial or monetary embarrassment has been followed by foreign aggressions and encroachments is very extraordinary; as is apparent in the following brief chronicle, which must have been familiar to the observation of Sir Robert Peel, up to 1851 :—

TABLE OF DIFFICULTIES AND AGGRESSIONS.

DIFFICULTIES.	AGGRESSIONS.
1819. Peel's Act passed, and the withdrawal of small notes is begun.	1822–3. The Congress of Verona, instigated by Russia, incite France to overturn by force the Spanish Constitution guaranteed by England. The Duc d'Angoulême enters Spain at the head of 100,000 men and disperses the Cortes. Cadiz surrenders, and the British volunteers escape to their ships. Ferdinand VII., now absolute, refuses to recognise the debts of the Cortes. Russia refuses Villele's proposal of a joint guarantee of the independence of Turkey.
1822. The Houses are besieged with petitions complaining of universal distress. The ministers, appalled by the fall of prices, shrink from the Act of 1819, and pass the "Small-notes Act," which respites, as they think, the one and two pound bank-notes for ten years, from and after the 1st May 1823, after which prices again begin to rise.	

rent in his conduct on the confiscation of the ship *Vixen* by Russia, as to which he did not even trust himself

DIFFICULTIES.

1825–6. The small note respite brings on the terrible money crisis of December.

December 1825. The Bank of England saved by accidentally finding a box of one-pound notes. Great ruin and another fall of prices. Act passed to finally cancel all notes under five pounds, from and after May 1829. A continued depression and great distress follow, which force on first, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, and next the Reform-bill of 1831–2, when another run on the bank carries it in May 1832.

1835–6. Joint-stock bank system. President Jackson destroys the United States Bank, and restores cash payments throughout the Union. The reaction in England stops most of the joint-stock banks, and ruins all the American houses except Baring's. Twelve million dollars, due from American houses to this country, lost. A general stagnation of trade and agriculture ensues, which in 1841 destroys the Whig ministry, and lasts until 1843, when the *Railway Mania* begins to appear. The reckless management of the joint-stock banks causes parliamentary interference.

1839. Short crops of grain in 1838 and in 1839 cause a heavy import.

AGGRESSIONS.

1828–9. Canning recognises the revolted Spanish colonies to prevent their reconquest by French aid. The Russians invade Turkey. Russian ships blockade the Turkish ports—the Turkish fleet having been destroyed by Russia, France, and England at Navarino. Wellington insists on the blockade of Enos being ended. Prince Lieven threatens war, and forces Wellington to ask it as a favour from the Czar. Diebitch takes Adrianople. Turkey virtually at the feet of Russia. (*Vid. Portfolio, 2d Series, No.* 1.) The French occupy Algiers, and refuse to retire.

1836–7. Russia destroys British influence in Persia, and invades Circassia. She stops all trade with the Circassian coast and warns off or captures all traders. The *Vixen* is, with the cognizance of King William IV., sent out with a cargo of salt to Circassia. The British ambassador at Constantinople declares the Russian proceedings illegal. The Russians take and confiscate the *Vixen*. The ministers make inquiry, and conceal the opinions of the crown law advisers. The Russians refuse all restitution, and the British ministers succumb. (*Vid. Hansard*, 1837.) The State of Maine repudiates the award of the King of Holland on the Boundary Question. The Persians, aided by Russian engineers, besiege Herat, the key of Western India.

1839. The judges of the State of Maine try Mr M'Leod, a British offi-

to speak, so deeply humiliating were the circumstances. But the fatal error was this, that Sir Robert nourished

DIFFICULTIES.

The bank towards Autumn is stripped of its reserves. Aid asked of the Bank of France, which agrees to discount and give coin and bullion for 2½ millions sterling, in bills drawn upon Jew bankers in Paris by the Bank of England. This alone averts a stoppage of the Bank of England.

1846–7–8. The railway speculations reach their zenith and are blown up. Vast ruin follows and great depression. A repeal of the corn-law forced on by the League. The potato blight. A million and a-half of persons starved or driven out of Ireland. The ports opened. The reserves of the Bank are again exhausted, and the panic of October 1847 occurs. The ministers are compelled to suspend Peel's Act of 1844, in order to prevent a general bankruptcy. The French government is subverted by the Republicans. The British government acknowledge the French Republic without delay.

1849–53. The ports are finally opened for grain, and a great fall of prices takes place. Gold from California, and also from Australia. The Bank reserves rise to £19,000,000. Deficient harvests in 1850, 1851, and 1852. The Bank reserves again sink down as low as £12,000,000. Lord Derby overturns the Whig ministry, but is defeated in the elections. The Whigs join the Peelites. Lord Aberdeen is

AGGRESSIONS.

cer, for destroying the steamer Caroline, whilst aiding Canadian rebels. He is indicted for murder but acquitted. Russia unites Austria and Prussia with England in a quadrupartite treaty to curb the Pasha of Egypt. The Syrian war. Hostilities threatened by France, and averted with great difficulty. Vicovich, a Russian envoy, at Cabul. The war in Affghanistan, and an army lost at the Kyber Pass.

1846–7–8. The French overthrow British influence in Spain a second time. Espartero flees to England. Louis Philippe compels the marriages of the Queen of Spain and her sister —the latter is united to the Duc de Montpensier. General Narvaez rules Spain, supported by Louis Philippe. Russia erects forts at the mouth of the Danube, and extorts tolls. The free *entrepôt* of Cracow seized by Austria. The Danube is rendered hardly navigable. A revolt in Austria and Hungary. The Russians reconquer Hungary for Austria, and put down the German revolution.

1853–4. The French Emperor Louis Napoleon interferes in behalf of the Christians in Turkey. The Czar sends Menzchikoff to the Sultan to claim a protectorate of the Greek Christians. The Sultan refuses it. The Czar sets England and France at defiance, and enters Moldavia and Wallachia. The Turks break away from the British and French mediation, and declare war against Russia. England, France, Aus-

the delusion that these evils could be cured by emendation rather than reversal of the measures of 1819,—a second mistake, just as great as was the first.

In this delusion he was doubtless encouraged by many whose interest it was that the injustice of the step of 1819 should be perpetuated. It has been already observed, that the mind of the first minister was more astute than powerful, and more capable of seeing clearly what lay immediately before him than of grasping and mastering abstract and complex questions of any kind. Hence his convictions on economic questions were supplied by others rather than arrived at by himself, and he invariably consulted the very men most likely to mislead him. In 1819, he found an *ignis fatuus* in a stock-jobber—in 1844, in a banker! And yet he ought to have known and reflected that the selfish fears of this class of men lest hostilities should reverse the "settlement," as they called the Currency Act of 1819, were the actual cause of the whole of the disgraces attendant upon our diplomacy, which every minister since the days of Castlereagh and Canning has so acutely felt.

The measure, now proposed by Sir Robert was laid in detail before the House of Commons on the 6th of May, when the House resolved itself into a committee on the Bank-charter question. The address, in the course of which the details of the plan were

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made prime minister of a coalition ministry. The bank reserve falls to ten millions. Lord Palmerston made Premier.

AGGRESSIONS.

tria, and Prussia again mediate. The Czar rejects the Vienna note. The Turkish fleet burned. The British and French aid the Sultan, and defend Turkey. Austria negotiates a peace.

given, exhibited the clearness of explanation for which the Premier was remarkable. It also dealt in some obvious but not unsuccessful ridicule of the extraordinary definitions of a pound sterling, indulged in by those who advocated a measure of value which should vary day by day;—an idea just as absurd as that of the Irish guide-post which also performed the office of a weather-cock by turning round with the wind! But the right honourable baronet totally failed to show that his scheme had the slightest chance of realizing the consequence he expected from it, which was the prevention of monetary panics in future. That even Sir Robert Peel's plausibility should be at fault in such an enterprise is no matter for wonder; inasmuch as it is plainly impossible that occasional panics should ever be averted as long as the paper credit of the kingdom—including not only the circulation of the Bank of England and of the country banks, but the current bills of exchange and the balances in the hands of bankers—is left to depend upon the integrity of a few millions in bullion lodged in the vaults of the Bank of England.

The details of the Act as proposed by the Premier are familiar to the public, and need not therefore be repeated here. The definitions of some of the advocates of an inconvertible paper-currency, as stated by Sir Robert, are sufficiently unmeaning; but his own plans *quoad* the objects he had in view are scarcely less futile.* The Premier, or whoever was the author

* The quotations with which Sir Robert made himself merry are as follows, ludicrous enough certainly:—"One writer said, that 'a

of the plan adopted by him, seems to have supposed that, by compelling the Bank of England to have bullion to set against all notes circulated by the directors above £14,000,000 and by limiting the issues of other banks that circulated their own notes, all panics might be avoided. This assumption is, however, wholly gratuitous and unfounded. A reckless speculative spirit might be fostered by country banks, in spite of the Bank of England, to an extent sufficient to produce a crisis, with Sir Robert's limitation law in full operation; and a famine, or a general war, may produce a state of affairs, creative of insuperable difficulty and consequent panic, just as surely as improvident discounts. In fact, something like the former supposition actually occurred in 1836–7; and, in 1847, it was proved how valueless were Sir Robert's precautions to avert the perilous effects of a sudden and great importation of grain. In short, so far from this act lessening the perils

pound might be defined to be a sense of value in reference to currency as compared with commodities;' another writer was dissatisfied with that definition, thinking the public had a right to something more definite and tangible, and that the meaning of a *reference to currency as compared with commodities* was not very obvious to unenlightened minds. This writer said, more oracularly, 'There is a standard, and there is a unit which is the measure of value, and that unit is the interest of £33, 6s. 8d. at *three per centum*, that being £1, and being paid in a bank-note as money of account.' The last definition," said Sir Robert, "that I shall quote runs thus:—'The standard is neither gold nor silver; but it is something set up in the imagination, to be regulated by public opinion.'"—*Hansard's Debates, Third Series*, vol. lxxiv. p. 725.—(These certainly are hardly to be matched, except in the writings of Jacob Bœhmen, or Duns Scotus).

against which it professes to guard, it actually increases them.

The plain and unsophisticated truth of the matter is this: In the present position of the Bank with regard to the general currency and general credit of the country, two perilous alternatives are always hanging over us; and these alternatives may be brought close to us, by more than one contingent event, of no very improbable nature. A commercial speculative spirit, rashly fostered, may produce such a crisis. Or it may be produced by famine; or a general European war may (most likely of all) produce it. The alternatives are these. First, the Bank may by the disappearance of its metallic reserves be reduced to certain stoppage; unless—(second) it reduces its circulation so violently and suddenly as to imperil all credit and bring on a general bankruptcy. But in a country like this, where the frame-work of society mainly rests upon credit, either of these alternatives involves the destruction of the government; and therefore, when either is imminent, government *must*, at all hazards, interfere and do something to relieve the terrible risk of the situation. Four times the dilemma described has occurred; and twice government has been compelled, at all hazards, to interfere. In 1797, Mr Pitt prevented a stoppage by suspending cash-payments. In 1825, an issue of one-pound notes averted the crisis. In 1839, a crisis was prevented by the aid of the Bank of France. In 1847, Lord John Russell suspended the law on his own responsibility. Now it is surely evident that the

arrangement proposed by the Prime-minister brings this dilemma nearer, instead of removing it to a greater distance. In the three instances first referred to, the treasure of the Bank was reduced below two millions before the position was considered to be one of imminent danger. Under Sir Robert Peel's arrangement, the peril to the credit of the country begins much sooner. In fact, under this arrangement, as soon as the metallic reserve in the issue department is reduced to *eight millions*, the peril is imminent.

This is quite obvious. It may be safely assumed that, to keep the general credit and circulation of the country in a healthy and active state, it is requisite that the Bank of England should have notes floating to the amount of *nineteen millions sterling*, at least. This everybody admits. But, to do this, *five* millions of the *eight* in the issue-department must be permanently locked up there. The remaining *three* millions must also be kept intact; because, taking into account the balances which private bankers and great merchants and discounters always keep in the Bank of England in ordinary times, the Bank is always liable, if a season of panic sets in, to have *three millions* at once withdrawn, or, as merchants say, "chequed out." When the bank metallic reserve, therefore, is reduced to *eight millions*, the peril is tremendous; because the exportation of a single million more might and certainly would, if no interference took place, wreck the entire credit of the nation. This conclusion is quite inevitable. If we only suppose a single million so withdrawn from the bank circulation, we must add to

that about three millions more, withdrawn in the country; this being nearly the result. The scarcity of money, the dishonoured bills, and postponed payments, so created, inevitably cause a further diminution of bankers' and merchants' balances in the bank, and this still further narrows accommodation, the directors being compelled to restrict their discounts or sell exchequer-bills to keep their circulation within legal limit; and thus, even supposing the drain of gold to go no further, panic may ensue.

In spite, however, of the real absurdity of its plan, the Banking Act of 1844 passed without any opposition deserving the name. The few who understood the measure knew that it was futile, and knew, at the same time, that opposition was unavailing. Both the great parties in the House had been seduced by the Economists to pledge themselves to the measure of 1819, to which the act of 1844 was only a fitting supplement. Instead of decreasing the peril and mischief perennially produced by the act of 1819, it has augmented both; and of this Sir Robert Peel himself lived to see ample proof within three years after its enactment. Perhaps the most extraordinary part of the transaction was, that the act could become law, as it now stands, in the teeth of some of the evidence adduced; and especially after the bold and veracious exposure of the folly and danger of the present system of currency, afforded in the admirable evidence of James William Gilbart, Esq., managing director of the London and Westminster Bank, a man who to much knowledge unites talent and moral courage to an extent rare, in

this country at least.* It is impossible to overrate the importance of portions of that evidence, or to

* The evidence alluded to speaks for itself. They who cannot see its importance must be beyond all teaching. It is important, because it reveals, past a doubt, the true opinions of the moneyed interest upon this vital but ticklish point. Mr Gilbart was talking of the Bank of England being holders of foreign securities.

"1064. Your answer assumes that the exchanges are never likely to be adverse during the period of a war, or that the drain of gold is not likely to be considerable; how do you reconcile that with the circumstances attending the last war or with the war in 1797, when the Bank was reduced to a state of exhaustion of its treasure?—I do not know that any answer assumes that; but, however, as a political question, rather than a banking one, I confess that, if I were the Prime-minister, I would immediately, on the commencement of a war, issue an order in Council for the Bank to stop payment.

"1065. Then you are of opinion that a suspension of payment is necessarily the consequence of a war?—'Necessarily' is a strong term; but I should think it the best measure to adopt, and I should decidedly adopt it."

These answers seem to have a little startled the committee; and, accordingly, *Mr Gisborne* returns to the charge, as follows:—

"1143. Supposing the Bank held the best securities which the world affords to the amount, first, of the £22,000,000 which it now holds, and of the £11,000,000 which it has lent to government, can you conceive any circumstances, but those of a total subversion of all credit, under which it would not be able, by means of those securities, to meet any demands made upon it?—No. I think that, under all circumstances, it would be able to secure the convertibility of its notes.

1144. *Sir Thomas Fremantle.*—Do you mean to say that the Bank would be able to do so in a time of war?—In a time of war I would stop payment at once. It would be better to stop before the gold was gone than afterwards.

praise too much the frank and manly bearing of the gentleman who gave it.

"1145. *Mr Warburton.*—You would recommend that as a desirable thing in itself?—Yes, as an expedient thing. * * * *

"1148. *Sir Robert Peel.*—You would advise, under certain circumstances, a bank-restriction as an immediate measure?—If you had a war, a bank-restriction I should immediately recommend."

With what intention the Premier put the questions which follow it is difficult to say. He seems to wish to drive Mr Gilbart to say that, without another depreciation of money, a great war cannot by this country be carried on. But this admission Mr Gilbart studiously evades.

"1149. * * * * * - When you issued your measure of restriction, what is the corresponding security that you would take to prevent that excess of issue which you have admitted to be an evil?—In advocating immediate restriction, I am not speaking as a banker but a politician. I should certainly enact the restriction of cash notes, to prevent the enemy withdrawing the gold from this country.

"1150. In your capacity as a politician, would you not think an artificial advance of prices would be an evil?—Yes, I should.

"1151. What, then, is the measure you would take to prevent that evil?—I should endeavour to prevent the notes being issued in excess. * * * In what way I should do this I do not know; nor have I considered the subject; because I do not think it likely that I shall ever be appointed Prime-minister."

The preceding questions and answers show, clearly enough, that Mr Gilbart's opinion really was, that no war, involving more loans and a further large addition to the debt, is practicable without a second bank-restriction and depreciation of money. On a further examination, *Mr Warburton* seems to wish to drive Mr Gilbart either to qualify what he had said, or to fall into some inconsistency which might damage his evidence. This attempt Mr Gilbart, not choosing to commit himself further on a subject on which he gave no opinion as a banker, parries; but it is easy to see what his real view was.

The enactment of the Bank Act of 1844 was in reality the most important deed of the session.

"1272. *Mr Warburton.*—In answer to question 1064 you stated that if you were Prime-minister you would, immediately upon the commencement of a war, issue an order in council for the Bank to stop payment; and in 1148 you state, 'If you have a war, a bank-restriction immediately I should recommend;' and further, in answer to question 1160, you say, 'If it were an inconvertible paper-currency, if the paper were not issued to excess, but merely in compliance with the legitimate demands of commerce, I think it would not lead to advance of prices, and I am justified in that opinion by Mr Ricardo;' are the committee to understand from that answer that you would couple this restriction upon bank-payments with such a limitation of amount as would not occasion the market-price of gold to rise above the mint-price?—I wish to give explanations of those answers. I stated that if I were Prime-minister, I should, immediately upon the commencement of a war, issue an order in Council for the Bank to stop payment. I stated also that, in giving that opinion, I spoke as a politician and not as a banker. The only war that has occurred in my memory is the war of twenty years with France; and of course, when speaking of a war, that is the war to which I referred; that war of twenty years called forth all the energies of the country. It required us to subsidize foreign powers. It required us to keep an army on the Continent; and it also required us to make very heavy loans. Now, under such a war as that it appeared to me that a suspension of cash-payments would be advisable. I recollect some time ago investigating the circumstances attending the suspension of cash-payments in 1797; and though I am not prepared to undergo a cross-examination upon every point connected with them, yet I came to the conclusion that, under the circumstances in which the Bank was then placed, a suspension of cash-payments was not a matter of choice but of necessity; that if not necessary at that particular period, it must have become necessary by subsequent events. That was the opinion at which I arrived after a most careful investigation of it; it is an opinion which has since been confirmed by the writings of Mr M'Culloch; and when I

of that year, the rest of which was mostly consumed in abortive and premature discussion. Sir Robert Peel, who rarely failed in any parliamentary undertaking, found it impossible by means of "a twelve hours' bill" to effect a compromise between the great Lancashire and Yorkshire manufacturers and their work-people. Too many of Sir Robert's own sup-

referred to a war, it was a war similar to that. With respect to any war of a different character that might now occur, the circumstances would be different; and upon that I can give no opinion. But with reference to the opinion I then gave, I stated that I gave it as a politician and not as a banker. * * * *

"1273. Do you mean, in that answer, to say that you would, during war, so regulate the amount of bank-issues that the market-price of gold should not materially rise above mint-price?—I am not prepared to state, at present, how I should regulate the bank-issues during war. Much would depend on circumstances.

"1274. Then you will not inform the committee whether, in the case of a suspension of cash-payments, you would recommend a depreciation of the value of gold or not?—The suspension of cash-payments is a supposititious case at present, and I cannot now state what course I might pursue in such a case.

"1275. But having told the committee that in a time of war you would recommend a suspension of cash-payments, is not that also a supposititious case?—Precisely so; and for that reason I wish to make no further allusion to it."

Second Report on Banks of Issue, 1841, pp. 112, 118, 130.

It is plain what Mr Gilbart's opinion is, although he did not choose to be driven into stating it. It is no doubt the real opinion of the moneyed interest; and when we consider the enormous sums making up that interest, and the consequences of a depreciation, down to the level of 1815, of this mass of capital, it is easy to predict the course which, in the case supposed, that interest must pursue; seeing, as we do, the feelings that must influence it.

porters were pledged to a ten hours' bill to admit of such a compromise; and the friends of the poor and oppressed weavers would hear of nothing less. Equally useless in appearance was the discussion of a total repeal of the corn-laws. Both the leading parties in the state were as yet heartily opposed to that measure; for although some few of the Whigs had come to advocate a total repeal, their leader, Lord Melbourne, was utterly averse to any such experiment, which he had designated as little short of insanity. Out of doors, however, men's feelings were becoming gradually changed. The more sensible portion of the working men began to perceive that, whatever might be the result to the owner of land, the industrious classes must be the better for such repeal; and that the rate of wages was not regulated by the price of provisions, but by the supply of labour in the market as compared with the demand, which demand a repeal of the corn-laws was certain to improve. As these feelings spread, the power, influence, and energy of the Anti Corn-law League were rapidly augmented; and it now began to be evident to most men that the next accession of difficulty and pressure would in all probability cause the violation of the bargain made by Mr Western and the landed interest in 1819.

One event more, both curious and important, although not then seen to be so, characterized the year 1844. This was the visit to this country of the Emperor of Russia, with the intention, as is now known, of preparing the British government for a partition of Turkey in Europe, and the possession by Russia of Constan-

tinople. It would be the height of injustice to accuse the Peel cabinet of any real participation in these iniquitous schemes; but it is to be feared that the insidious overtures of the Czar were not repelled in that spirit which induced Mr Pitt to threaten Russia with war if her aggressions against the Sultan were not dropped; and which animated his far greater father, when he exclaimed, "With that man who cannot see the vital importance to Great Britain of the independence of Turkey, I will not condescend to argue."*

* Upon the Czar's motives for this visit the *Memorandum of Count Nesselrode*, recently published, throws light. The design was to prepare the English government, and through their government the British people, for the partition of the Turkish empire, and a virtual or else actual possession of Constantinople by Russia. The language of the Memorandum is full of that studied ambiguity, so commonly used by the cunning diplomatists of that unprincipled court. It admits of two meanings all through; one *exoteric*, for the benefit and convenience of the British cabinet—the other *esoteric*, adapted to its own ends;—which were the seizure of Turkey in Europe and the command of the Black Sea; accompanied with pretended equivalents to be offered to Austria and to Great Britain; France being by this means isolated.

CHAPTER VIII.

Railway Speculation—Its Effects—Its delusive Nature—Prices rise—Sir Robert Peel encourages the Speculation—He proposes to add to Maynooth, and erect Irish Colleges—O'Connell's Opposition—Sir Robert's Plan adopted—Income Tax renewed—Power of the League—Sir Robert's Alarm—The Liberal Party court the League—Lord Howick denounces the Irish Church—Agitation in Ireland—The Potato Rot begins—Sir Robert proposes open Ports—Cabinet Divisions ensue—Lord Stanley opposes it—Lord John Russell's Letter—The Peel Ministry suddenly breaks up—Lord John Russell fails to form a Government—Earl Grey's Refusal—Sir Robert Peel reconstructs his Cabinet—Lord Stanley joins the Conservatives—Triumph of the League—Their extravagant Assertions—Session of 1846—Repeal of the Corn-laws proposed—Powerful Opposition—Mr D'Israeli—His Character—Sir Robert's Defence—Its Errors—His Measures pass the Commons—Coercion-bill for Ireland—Tactics of the Whigs—Lord George Bentinck aids—Tariff passes—Coercion-bill negatived—The Peel Ministry resigns.

OF the year 1845 the commencement was attended by auspices better than any which had ushered in any year since 1839. That series of wild and extravagant speculations, now generally known as "the railway *mania*," which began about 1843, was now approaching its zenith. Lines of railroad were commenced

upon estimates so extravagant as to stagger credulity itself; and when the work drew towards completion, the estimates of cost, monstrous as most of them were, proved generally insufficient for their object. This, however, was so far from checking the insanity of those who bewildered themselves in these delusive schemes, that it absolutely seemed to stimulate it. Persons of all ranks and both sexes rushed headlong into the wildest speculations, and indulged in the wildest dreams of gains to be derived from them. Compared with that which now took place, the South Sea Bubble, and the bubble projects of 1824-5, sunk into insignificance. The whole nation appeared to have suddenly lost their senses. Parliament was besieged by the promoters of bills for carrying out railroad hallucinations of the most extraordinary and incredible character; and, strange to relate, the designing and unscrupulous concoctors of these ruinous deceptions, although the utmost extent of their avowed object was the saving of a few hours and a few shillings to those who travelled or carried goods, were worshipped as if they were, or could be, the most important benefactors of the human race.

To carry forward and keep alive such a series of impostures fraud to a gigantic extent was, as a matter of course, to be perpetrated; but to the speculative and engineering contrivers of the whole this was an easy matter. False balance-sheets, authorizing false dividends of profits that never existed, were not of very difficult manufacture. Every representation was taken upon trust; for when so much was to be actually

received, credit to a corresponding extent was given; and the few who ventured to breathe a doubt as to the end of all that was going on, were sometimes tolerated from pity, but more often repelled with scorn. People seemed to think and act as if the words "railway" and "millennium" were synonymes, and as if the engineer was the archangel commissioned to proclaim them.

Out of all this evil, however, came good. It was impossible to carry forward these projects without an immense advance of money, in the shape of wages and salaries, and without consuming amazing quantities of different materials, of which iron was one of the principal. Thus, by means of this reckless expenditure, the quantity of money in active circulation was again, for a brief season, much extended, and another alleviation of the paralysis, inflicted by the Act of 1819, afforded. Together with the commercial world and dealers generally, government had its share of the transient fruits of this temporary diffusion of capital. The money now paid in wages of labour all over the kingdom was vastly augmented above its average amount; and of the wages of the labouring man about one half, on the average, finds its way to the exchequer. Whether the Premier was really deceived by this brief apparition of a fictitious prosperity, it is impossible to say. Men who are deficient in the power of imagination become easily captivated by anything that appears in a gigantic and imposing shape; and Sir Robert might probably yield too readily to a sensation, of a sort not customary, without much inquiry into the

nature of the source whence it sprang. Whether he was deceived or not, however, certain it is that he condescended to sanction these enterprises in appearance; and, on the occasion of some line being begun near his seat of Drayton Manor, he turned the first turf with a silver spade, which bears an inscription commemorative of this very questionable display. If, however, in this act the wisdom of the man be questioned, it would be cruel too severely to criticise the minister. For four years, nearly, had he contended against the difficulty of ruling a nation crushed down by a pressure to which it had not yet become accustomed; and the alleviation now afforded must have been too grateful to his feeelings to allow of his too narrowly scrutinizing causes.

As one of the consequences of the speculative fever with which the country, for a time, seemed to be actually delirious, the session of parliament was opened amidst what seemed to be, and were generally taken for, the symptoms of a renewed prosperity; and was, accordingly, opened with a speech from the throne, of which national prosperity was one of the prominent topics. It had been the accustomed device of the advocates of Sir Robert Peel's monetary measures, from and after 1819, always to take the exception for the rule, and the rule for the exception. In 1825, in 1836, and now in 1845, the temporary alleviations of the pernicious consequences of these measures were studiously represented as the effects of some mysterious, indescribable, national, regenerative, power; whilst the reaction and pressure, which in-

variably followed the termination of these brief respites, were as studiously described as mere accidental and temporary reverses. This line of conduct sufficiently divulged the real sentiments of the Economists as to the working of their own measures; but it also proved how easy it is to mislead a nation that will not take the trouble to try to understand its own position. After expatiating upon the assumed prosperity of the country, the most important position of the speech was that which referred to Ireland. The minister had overcome the bitterest of his enemies, Mr O'Connell. He had become really master of Ireland; and, as usual with him, was now devising measures to soothe the irritation of the conflict in which he had been victor. His panacea, at this juncture, was extension of education in Ireland amongst the Catholic as well as the Protestant portion of the Irish people.

His means of doing this was first to propose the grant of a large augmentation of annual pecuniary aid to the Roman-catholic College at Maynooth, and next to erect, at the expense of government, six other colleges in Ireland, such colleges to be open to professors of all sects of religion, but to be debarred from teaching theology of any sort. This project was warmly opposed by all those English and Scotch members, who still thought that the Papists of the nineteenth century were as little to be trusted as their predecessors of the fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth. It was also opposed by the immediate friends of Mr O'Connell, and by Mr O'Connell himself. But, alas! the great agitator was now an altered man.

He felt that he had set his power "upon the cast," and that the chances of the dice had run against him. It was lost, never to be regained. All eyes now saw that from the blow of 1844 he would never recover. The infirmities of age, brought suddenly upon him by the chagrin and irritated feelings of so galling a reverse, and so lamentable a finish, had now rendered his step feeble, his voice tremulous, and bowed down his once athletic frame; whilst his downcast and bedimmed eye seemed silently to upbraid his destiny, as the Ceylonese chieftain did his, aloud—"Oh! Fortune!—fickle goddess!—what has thy once-loved favourite, Rajah Singa, done?" Mr O'Connell styled the proposed educational establishments "godless colleges;" asserted that no Catholic would cross their threshold; and that they would be an evil, and not a boon to Ireland. The opposition of Mr O'Connell on one side, and Sir Harry Inglis on the other, were however totally unavailing. The grant to Maynooth, and the funds necessary for the collegiate experiment, were voted by large majorities; and the power of Sir Robert Peel seemed now to be placed on a sure and lasting foundation.

The other measures of the session were carried with equal ease, and proposed with equal certainty of success. The income-tax, which had been voted for three years only, was to be renewed. This, however, was easily effected, when the fluttering state of the national pulse, excited, as it was, to some appearance of returning health by the feverish action of the railway expenditure, seemed to promise that

the next three years would certainly be the last. It was renewed, accordingly, with hardly a semblance of opposition; whilst the Premier, availing himself of the more cheering hues which the national prospects now transiently exhibited, seized the opportunity to tie more closely to him the party of Political Economists, whose devices had already shaped his destiny so strangely; and this he did by proposing still further relaxations of the tariff, especially with respect to fat cattle and provisions from abroad.

There can be little doubt that, even at this time, Sir Robert Peel, unrivalled as he was in judging of public opinion, and foreseeing the direction and strength of the current, perceived the ultimate solution which the question of corn-laws was doomed to receive. He saw that the strength and influence of the League was increasing hourly, and that the Leaguers were now backed by a majority of the working-classes, whose more discerning advisers began to perceive the remote and ultimate consequences to which a total repeal of these laws was, under the circumstances of the country, likely to lead. He saw that, in the House of Commons, a decreasing majority and increasing minority were the results of every division. He saw that his party-opponents, stung to desperation by the loss of a power which, in 1832, they fondly deemed was secure for half a century to come, were, one by one, making up their minds to secure the gratitude of the League, and to mount again the summits of power by the aid of the athletic shoulders of Messrs Cobden and Bright. But, above all, Sir Robert Peel saw

that the population was now increasing at the morbid rate of about a million in three years; that this morbid tendency to increase too fast would be more and more stimulated as food was withheld, and the diet of the millions brought lower and lower; and that, therefore, the question was now reduced to one of time only, as no law to restrict the importation of food could continue to exist amid rapidly increasing and starving millions. Hence, no doubt, the Premier foresaw a time when, by the aid of the Leaguers, he might be compelled, at all risks, to throw open the ports to grain and provisions of every kind; and his silent and cunningly studied advances, whilst they alarmed and irritated the high Conservative party who had helped to place him at the head of affairs, encouraged and conciliated those whose politics went no further than free-trade, and who deemed a repeal of the corn-laws a *panacea* for every conceivable evil that could befall or be inflicted upon a country.

Thus, although the session of 1845 was the least trying of any which the minister had encountered, and one in which his power and influence seemed unbounded, there were not wanting symptoms of the lengths to which his Whig opponents were preparing to go, in order once more to destroy that influence; and amongst these the most extraordinary was, perhaps, a speech of Lord Howick, during a debate on the Irish Church, in which that noble lord broadly vindicated the right of the Roman-catholic hierarchy to the greatest part of the church-property, which he declared, being theirs originally by gift, was still

theirs by right, to an extent proportionate to the numbers of Catholics as compared with that of Protestants, and without giving them which he believed there never could be peace in Ireland. With what view this bold declaration on the part of the noble lord was thrown out, it is impossible to say. It was certainly not echoed by those with whom he acted; but it produced a prodigious effect in Ireland, where it was deemed to be a feeler, indicating the secret determination of the Liberal party to make Catholicism the dominant religion of Ireland, rather than not return to power. Thus, although in all outward appearance the power of Sir Robert seemed greater than ever it had been, the ties which held his supporters together were silently being broken or enfeebled; and those whose position enabled them to look narrowly into the state of affairs, saw plainly that a political crisis was now preparing, which would at length arrive, even should fortune, who seems to delight in showing how little reliance can be placed upon human combinations or resolves, not bring about anything to precipitate it.

Such was the apparently firm basis upon which the Peel administration now stood, when, on the 9th of August, the session of parliament was brought to a close; but how vain are often the seemingly most just and wise conclusions of man! History assures us that, when power appears to have reached a height from which dislodgment seems impossible, at that very moment it is frequently undermined, or on the brink of some unforeseen catastrophe, from which it

is not doomed to escape. Even so was it in this case. On that very 9th of August, when the great council of the nation was dismissed amidst the firing of cannon and the shouts of a thoughtless populace, that Almighty Power, whose all-pervading wisdom governs the moral as well as the physical elements which constitute the world, was about to give that world a lesson, and suddenly to bring about one of those extraordinary events which change the destinies and confound the resolves of nations and their rulers.

In the course of this biography the state of Ireland and the causes of that state have been partially explained. Intended by nature for a growing country, and meant to support a moderate population, subsisting mostly upon animal food, it was first by reckless rulers forced into tillage, and then again by the cruel cupidity of its landlords into a system to which no country can be reduced without the certainty of some dreadful catastrophe; in short, the millions of Ireland were now reduced to depend for their subsistence upon a miserable root, unfit to form the staple of human subsistence. Under this system the numbers of the Irish had so rapidly increased that millions depended for life upon a small plot of ground, planted with potatoes, upon which the lives of a whole family hung, and the loss of which, by whatever means, was equivalent to a sentence of starvation. The enormous and startling peril of such a social state as this had not been unnoticed; but the few warnings given met the fate of those of Cassandra, and were treated as crotchets, or as the effusions of designing croakers and dema-

gogues.* The time had now come, however, when the awful truth of these warnings was to be proved.

* The following warnings need no comment. The first is quoted from an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, 1835, by Mr William Paton, a resident in the Isle of Man; extracts from which are published in the *Annual Register* of that year. Having noticed the evidence of debility in the potato plant, Mr Paton thus proceeds:—

"We now come to what I consider the very root of the evil, viz., a predisposition in the potato plant to receive the disease in question. This predisposition I conceive to result from its having *degenerated*, in consequence of having been subjected to a long course of artificial cultivation; and that our attention, therefore, must be directed mainly to the means of preventing this degeneracy, whilst we endeavour to remove all such external causes of the disease as may be under our control. That the potato, in common with all other cultivated productions of the vegetable world, has a tendency to degenerate, when the laws of nature are deviated from, must be granted; and, considering it was not a native of this country, it is reasonable to expect that it will degenerate in proportion as the means to prevent its doing so are neglected.

With respect to the potato, nature clearly seems to have made provision for the permanent health as well as the productiveness of her offspring in the seed contained in the berry which the plant produces from its stalks. Hence, consequently when we endeavour to perpetuate any particular sort of potato by continually cutting and planting its tubers, it is reasonably to be expected that we shall injure its general properties and powers, and thus gradually render it less fit for food and more liable to disease. And extensive observation has convinced me that the taint far more frequently attacks the long cultivated and more delicate sorts of potatoes than any other; the former I conceive because the vegetative powers have become disordered and enfeebled by a long course of treatment *opposed to nature.* * * * * * *

In 1833 I raised from the berry a great variety of new sorts. In

Hardly had parliament separated, and hardly had the ears of the inhabitants of Westminster ceased ringing with the sound of the cannon with which the mushroom millennium of railway prosperity was celebrated, when it began to be whispered in the newspapers that a destructive disease had appeared in the potato grounds both of England and Ireland, which was attracting great attention in the latter country. In

1834 the best were selected and planted separately. At the present time, although planted late and cut, they display an extraordinary degree of health and vigour; whilst beside them, in the same field, some of the old sorts are not only feeble but tainted and curled." Nothing can be more convincing than this reasoning; which probably had passed through the acute mind of Mr Cobbett when he made the extraordinary prediction, in 1834, which follows:—

Talking with Dr Smith on the condition of Ireland, Cobbett said, "The dirty weed (the potato) would be the curse of Ireland." "How so?" replied Dr Smith;—"What would the people do without it? They live upon it; they have had it in cultivation one hundred and eighty years." Cobbett answered—"They must go back to the food they were accustomed to live upon before the general cultivation of the dirty weed;—and that is to grain,—to wheat,—to oats, and rye. You have, doctor, four millions of souls (males) in Ireland, and eight millions of acres of uncultivated soil. This ground must be drained and brought into cultivation, and must grow wheat, rye, oats, &c. *The potato will not last twenty years more. It will work itself out; and then you will see to what a state Ireland will be reduced!* You must return to the grain crops; and then Ireland, instead of being the most degraded, will become one of the finest countries in the world. You may live to see my words prove true; but I never shall."

This was said, and put on record, in the summer of 1834. In 1835 Mr Cobbett died. Ten years sufficed to fulfil this singular prediction.

England, where the operation of the poor-law has prevented the mass of the people from being driven so low as to depend for subsistence upon a wretched root, the circumstance attracted little notice from the public. In Ireland, and in the Highlands of Scotland, it was the reverse; for when the lives of millions depend upon the growth of a single species of plant, and that plant begins to exhibit unmistakable symptoms of a tendency to general decay, the situation is terrible indeed. The dreadful nature of the probable position could not, of course, be unknown to the government, and frequent cabinet councils began to excite public attention, followed, as they were, by rumours of divisions amongst the ministers, of the real cause of which the public in general were still ignorant. A few weeks, however, sufficed to reveal the mystery.

To the practical mind of Sir Robert Peel the dreadful nature of the calamity probably impending over unfortunate Ireland was seen to be clear from the very first. He had seen the state of society there with his own eyes, and no sensible person who had been an eyewitness of the scene could doubt as to the appalling results of a failure of the potato-crop should it be extensive. The Premier, therefore, as soon as the extent of the blight was ascertained to be considerable, naturally and wisely looked forward to the necessity of throwing open the ports to the importation of provisions of every sort, and to the possibility, nay, probability, of this state of things continuing through several years. In the existing state of public opinion, though to open the ports would be an easy matter, it was

plain that, to reimpose restrictions after thus relaxing them, would be all but impossible. The excitement which already existed on the subject was certain to be immensely augmented by the appalling spectacle of a famine in Ireland, and Sir Robert, as was his duty, laid before the cabinet his fears that, in this event, the corn-laws could not longer be maintained. The cabinet, however, were divided. Lord Stanley in particular insisted upon the bargain which Mr Western and his friends, on the part of the landowners, made in 1819 with the Economists, including Sir Robert Peel himself, arguing, that "if such a compact could be violated with impunity, national faith was a farce;" and in this divided state the ministry continued for some weeks, until it was broken up by an unexpected move made by an opponent less scrupulous, and "the question of corn-laws"—to use the phrase of Mr Canning—"set at rest for ever."*

An opportunity too tempting to be resisted had now presented itself for oversetting a second time the power of Sir Robert Peel. It was true that some of the leaders of the Opposition were at heart much more strongly opposed to the destruction of these laws, and the violation of the compact of 1819, than ever was Sir Robert. If, however, they could be persuaded that the repeal was

* "Be it recollected that Sir Robert Peel only *conceded* the corn-law to *purchase*, in 1819, the money-law. Sir James Graham has, in a mood of frankness, himself exposed that dark transaction."—*Recent Events in the East, by David Urquhart, Esq.*, p. 287.

This is true; but the truth was sufficiently manifested by the conduct of Mr Western at that period.

now, be its consequences what they might, inevitable, and be thus induced to unite with the Anti Corn-law League, and the millions that now supported it, the ruin of the ministry, or at all events of the Premier, was certain, inasmuch as if it were carried in spite of him, his fall was of course involved; and if he gave way, the high conservative party by whom he was placed in office were sure, as they did in 1830, after the Catholic Emancipation-bill was carried, in revenge to desert him. Upon these unquestionably secure grounds the leader of the opposition in the Commons doubtless acted, and the effect was decisive.

On the 22d November 1845, Lord John Russell, being then at Edinburgh, addressed to his constituents, the electors of the city of London, a letter, in which, after alluding to the dreadful calamity now impending over miserable Ireland, he expressed his conviction that some final settlement of the question of protection for the British and Irish growers of corn must now be necessarily carried; and plainly stated, that no plan on the part of government, for regulating the markets for grain, could either be satisfactory or permanent.* Lord John further expressed his opin-

* "Gentlemen,—The present state of the country, in regard to its supply of food, cannot be viewed without apprehension. Forethought and bold precaution may avert any serious evils—indecision and procrastination may produce a state of suffering which it is frightful to contemplate.

"Three weeks ago it was generally expected that Parliament would be immediately called together. The announcement that ministers were prepared at that time to advise the crown to summon Parliament, and to propose on their first meeting a suspension of the import

ion that government might, and probably would, be inactive, unless the people themselves urged them to

duties on corn, would have caused orders at once to be sent to various ports of Europe and America for the purchase and transmission of grain for the consumption of the United Kingdom. An order in council dispensing with the law was neither necessary nor desirable. No party in Parliament would have made itself responsible for the obstruction of a measure so urgent and beneficial.

"The Queen's ministers have met and separated, without affording us any promise of such seasonable relief.

"It becomes us, therefore, the Queen's subjects, to consider how we can best avert, or at all events mitigate, calamities of no ordinary magnitude.

"Two evils require your consideration. One of these is the disease in the potatoes, affecting very seriously parts of England and Scotland, and committing fearful ravages in Ireland.

"The extent of this evil has not yet been ascertained, and every week, indeed, tends either to reveal unexpected disease, or to abate in some districts the alarm previously entertained. But there is one misfortune peculiar to the failure in this particular crop. The effect of a bad corn harvest is, in the first place, to diminish the supply in the market, and to raise the price. Hence diminished consumption, and the privation of incipient scarcity, by which the whole stock is more equally distributed over the year, and the ultimate pressure is greatly mitigated. But the fear of the breaking out of this unknown disease in the potatoes induces the holders to hurry into the market, and thus we have, at one and the same time, rapid consumption and impending deficiency, scarcity of the article and cheapness of price. The ultimate suffering must thereby be rendered far more severe than it otherwise would be. The evil to which I have adverted may be owing to an adverse season, to a mysterious disease in the potato, to want of science or of care in propagating the plant. In any of these cases, government is no more subject to blame for the failure of the potato crop than it was entitled to credit for the plentiful corn harvests which we have lately enjoyed.

"Another evil, however, under which we are suffering, is the fruit

put an end to a state of uncertainty fraught with injury to all classes, and concluded by enforcing the

of ministerial counsel and parliamentary law. It is the direct consequence of an act of parliament, passed three years ago, on the recommendation of the present advisers of the crown. By this law, grain of all kinds has been made subject to very high duties on importation. These duties are so contrived that the worse the quality of the corn, the higher is the duty; so that when good wheat rises to 70s. a-quarter, the average price of all wheat is 57s. or 58s., and the duty 15s. or 14s. a-quarter. Thus the corn barometer points to fair, while the ship is bending under a storm.

"This defect was pointed out many years ago by writers on the corn-laws, and was urged upon the attention of the House of Commons when the present act was under consideration.

"But I confess that, on the general subject, my views have, in the course of twenty years, undergone a great alteration. I used to be of opinion that corn was an exception to the general rules of political economy; but observation and experience have convinced me, that we ought to abstain from all interference with the supply of food. Neither a government nor a legislature can ever regulate the corn-market with the beneficial effects which the entire freedom of sale and purchase are sure of themselves to produce.

"I have for several years endeavoured to obtain a compromise on this subject. In 1839 I voted for a Committee of the whole House, with the view of supporting the substitution of a moderate fixed duty for the sliding scale. In 1841, I announced the intention of the then government of proposing a fixed duty of 8s. a-quarter. In the past session I proposed the imposition of some lower duty. These propositions were successively rejected. The present First Lord of the Treasury met them in 1839, 1840, and 1841, by eloquent panegyrics on the existing system—the plenty it had caused—the rural happiness it had diffused. He met the propositions for diminished protection in the same way in which he had met the offer of securities for Protestant interests in 1817 and 1825—in the same way in which he met the proposal to allow Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham, to send members to parliament in 1830.

propriety of some movement on the part of the city of London. This letter Lord John, in his explanation

"The result of resistance to qualified concessions must be the same in the present instance as in those I have mentioned. It is no longer worth while to contend for a fixed duty. In 1841 the free-trade party would have agreed to a duty of 8s. a-quarter on wheat, and, after a lapse of years, this duty might have been further reduced, and ultimately abolished. But the imposition of any duty at present, without a provision for its extinction within a short period, would but prolong a contest already sufficiently fruitful of animosity and discontent. The struggle to make bread scarce and dear, when it is clear that part, at least, of the additional price goes to increase rent, is a struggle deeply injurious to an aristocracy which (this quarrel once removed) is strong in property, strong in the construction of our legislature, strong in opinion, strong in ancient associations and the memory of immortal services.

"Let us, then, unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people.

"But if this end is to be achieved, it must be gained by the unequivocal expression of the public voice. It is not to be denied that many elections for cities and towns in 1841, and some in 1845, appear to favour the assertion that free-trade is not popular with the great mass of the community. The government appear to be waiting for some excuse to give up the present corn-law. Let the people, by petition, by address, by remonstrance, afford them the excuse they seek. Let the ministry propose such a revision of the taxes as, in their opinion, may render the public burdens more just and more equal; let them add any other provisions which caution, and even scrupulous forbearance, may suggest; but let the removal of restrictions on the admission of the main articles of food and clothing used by the mass of the people be required, in plain terms, as useful to all great interests, and indispensable to the progress of the nation.—I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

"J. Russell."

of his conduct, states to have been published on the 26th of November, four days after it was written. On that 26th of November, the cabinet having met, Sir Robert Peel in vain endeavoured to persuade Lord Stanley, who held, very naturally, by the aphorism that "a bargain is a bargain," that the period was now arrived when the total repeal of the protective corn-law had become a political necessity, be the ultimate consequences what they might. The Premier's persuasive powers, however, here for once failed him; and after some days spent in fruitless endeavours to re-unite the cabinet, he resolved at last, justly alarmed by the prospect of famine in Ireland and scarcity of food in Great Britain, to abandon the helm, and to leave to his political opponents, headed by Lord John Russell, the task of carrying through the legislature a bill for the total extinction of the existing duties and of all duties on grain.

Lord John Russell's letter did not certainly pledge his party formally to the views there enunciated. But it is impossible to doubt that, whilst writing it, he must have felt that one of its effects must be to cause a speedy repeal of the laws protective of agriculture; and that another effect must be, the ultimate expulsion of Sir Robert Peel and his immediate friends from power, together with the transfer of that power, in all human probability, to his own party. Statesmen seldom or never acknowledge the true motives of their acts. It would be unfair, therefore, to blame too severely the conduct of Lord John, when he denied that his motive in writing the letter, which unquestionably sealed the fate of the corn-laws, had any reference to the return

of the Whig party to office.* Ambition, however, rarely pulls off the mask. The professions of rising and of falling statesmen are equally to be distrusted. Everybody saw that the effect of this astutely timed letter would be the immediate or else ultimate removal

* Lord John expressed himself as follows:—"In this state of things (he had before described the perilous position of the unfortunate Irish population) I wrote the letter alluded to, which was published, I think, on the 26th November, which stated strongly my opinion, and also an opinion that, as government did not seem to be active in taking proper measures, it would be necessary to give some public expression of opinion, in order to control their course, and obtain the redress that was absolutely necessary; and I think that, in thus stating my opinion to the public, if the facts which the right honourable baronet has stated are correct, I was perfectly justified.

"I know that some persons of low minds have supposed that I intended, as it is called, to advertise for office, by expressing these opinions. But nothing could be further from my intention. I intended merely to call for such an expression of public opinion as would oblige the government to take the subject into immediate consideration, and thus save the country from the evils of famine. On the 25th or 26th of November, it appears that the right honourable baronet again urged on his colleagues that the ports should be opened; and further, that the corn-laws themselves should be considered. Unfortunately—for I think it was a misfortune—his colleagues did not agree to this proposal; and it appears that there was a great difference of opinion on the subject. The right honourable baronet has not, indeed, explained the extent of the difference; but it was such that the government could not be carried on, and on the 6th of December the ministry resigned. On the 8th of December I received the commands of her Majesty to wait on her at Osborne House. I arrived in London on the 10th, and on the 11th of December I proceeded to the Isle of Wight. Of course it appeared to me probable that her Majesty had received the resigna-

from sway of Sir Robert Peel ; and it is too much to believe that the opportunity could be seen unconcernedly which led to the ruin of a rival who, contrary to all anticipation, had unexpectedly reseated himself in a power which promised to be almost as permanent as it was extraordinary.

The crisis, which for a few days broke up the Peel ministry, occurred December the 6th. Her Majesty seems to have lost no time in sending for Lord John Russell, who, when he obeyed the mandate of the Queen, did so, as he says, with a determination to decline the task of forming an administration, if asked to do so by the sovereign. This wise determination, however, his Lordship did not carry out. When once in the presence of royalty, his ideas of "the stern path of duty" seem to have undergone a total alteration. At her Majesty's bidding, he at once undertook the enterprise, and only failed, as he states, in consequence of the peremptory refusal of Earl Grey to make a part of the cabinet. What the precise reasons of the Earl were, Lord John did not think it proper to inform the House of Commons or the public; but, considering the position in which affairs then were, Earl Grey's refusal was, in all human probability, based on sound judgment. The

tion of her ministers, and had commanded my presence to consult me as to the formation of a new administration. I felt that, under ordinary circumstances, the only thing I could properly do was most respectfully to decline the commission of her Majesty, as the party to which I belong are in a minority of from ninety to a hundred in the House of Commons; and I could not, with regard to the public service, expose her Majesty to the change of another change, to which my acceptance of office would probably lead."

Hansard's Debates, 3d Series, vol lxxxiii. p. 97.

formation of a Whig cabinet involved a dissolution of the Parliament; and when the excited state of the whole landed interest at that moment, and the prostrate and unpopular position of the Whigs as a party are considered, the chances were, as Earl Grey most likely felt, that an election would not have much bettered their condition, and Sir Robert Peel's subsequent conduct proved that this was his view of the crisis as well as that of Earl Grey. Be that as it might, the event was, that Lord John Russell was compelled to go to her Majesty with the news of the failure of his attempt to get a ministry together, and to say that he was ready to support any which Sir Robert Peel might form, upon the principle of setting the question of corn-laws at rest. The ultimate result was, that Sir Robert, being again sent for, undertook to reconstruct his cabinet upon this principle, which he did, leaving Lord Stanley out, as a matter of course.

Thus, by the force of a terrible and totally unexpected event—by the force of public opinion, as shaped by the untiring efforts of the Anti Corn-law League, and by the temporary junction of a part of the Conservative phalanx with the Liberals, was the once mighty landed interest checkmated and mastered by a combination of capitalists, manufacturers, money-brokers, and political economists, and made sensible of the wisdom of the observation of Sir Edward Coke, as to the fatuity of staking any great interest upon a bargain made with a government, which succeeding governments may not choose or may lack the ability to fulfil. It is undoubtedly true that, in 1819, the Conservative interest was

cruelly embarrassed by the false position with regard to the money-question in which the cabinet had placed itself, without knowing what it did. Still, had the Tory landlords of that day adopted the part which independence, patriotism, and common sense dictated, they might have stopped and finally baffled the rash, selfish, and blundering schemes of Horner and Ricardo, and their committees of 1810 and 1819, and thus saved their country and themselves from four-fifths of the evils which have, since that period, befallen both. Unfortunately for themselves and their country, they were short-sighted enough to prefer compromise to resistance, and to neglect the counsels of the elder Peel for the advice of his accomplished but then inexperienced son; and they were now to reap the reward of their folly, still further imbittered by the attendant consciousness that it was richly deserved.

By the singular interlude of the sudden destruction, and as sudden re-construction, of the Peel Cabinet the nation was thoroughly surprised. The extent of the peril which hovered over Ireland, and its certain consequences, were not yet dreamed of by a busy and heedless public, who never look beyond the events of the hour: and changes which had their origin in deeper causes were universally ascribed to political intrigue and a bidding for place, between Lord John Russell on the one hand, and Sir Robert Peel on the other. They who attribute the conduct of Sir Robert to these motives, however, do him injustice and misunderstand his character. In all probability, the minister acted, on this trying occasion, upon two dis-

tinct sets of motives. He was aware that, with a growing population, some great addition to the foreign trade of the country was necessary to afford employment to the growing millions. He saw that the rate of increase was augmented by the very privations that accompanied that increase; and he also well knew that foreign commerce resolves itself into barter; and that the raw produce of grain-growing nations must form the payment for British manufactures sent to those nations. Hence, to the mind of the minister the arguments of the free-traders, who represented the repeal of protection as an approaching state-necessity sure to arrive sooner or later, would apply themselves with great force.

But there was another peculiarity of Sir Robert's mental character which rendered him particularly liable to certain influences at this critical period. Unrivalled in his knowledge of mankind and in his judgment of public opinion and the immediate tendencies of events, he was timid in dealing with abstract questions of magnitude; and this want of self-reliance rendered him far too accessible to reasoners who to plausibility added assumption, and invested generalities, not always very profound, with the formalities of exact science. Hence, when he judged for himself he was seldom wrong: when he deferred to the opinions of others he was seldom right. It was clear that Sir Robert Peel had been deeply impressed by the bold assertions, everywhere made, that freedom of trade was the true *panacea* for the intermittent distemper under which, from and after 1819, the country had laboured; and

when it was argued that, unless the producer of grain and meat could show that he had peculiar burdens to bear from which the spinner and weaver of cotton was free, he no more needed protection than did the maker of calico, the Premier eagerly adopted the logic as conclusive. He did so because he had now a full conviction that the destruction of all protection for the land and its owners was inevitable; and because he naturally wished also to convince himself, if possible, of the groundlessness of those misgivings which shadowed forth, in the far distance, the ultimate consequences of the plunge that was now to be made.

Nor is it easy to blame Sir Robert Peel for being overcome by this conviction. In truth, after the publication of Lord John Russell's Scotch epistle, which virtually committed the Liberal party to the principles of the League, and said "Make us ministers and we will be your servants," the fate of the corn-laws was decided. The power of the Leaguers, both in the metropolis and in all the greater and lesser trading towns, was enormous. They had been little scrupulous as to their means in the acquisition of this power. They had, in truth, been "all things to all men." To the millions they promised doubled employment with a cheap loaf. To the manufacturer they promised double demand and lowered wages. And to the landowners they promised that, in spite of wheat at five shillings the bushel, land should be of higher value than ever. Everywhere some of these shots told: for men are too apt to believe what they wish; and when the Leaguers came to be joined by

one of the great parties of the state, how was Sir Robert to anticipate any result but one?

The memorable session of 1846 was opened by the queen personally on the 22d of January with a speech in which her Majesty was made, not only to congratulate the Houses of Parliament on the relaxation of the tariff that had already been assented to, but to ascribe the comparative ease now felt to this measure alone, as if the railway expenditure had nothing to do with it; the paragraph concluding with a recommendation to the Houses to consider whether an extension of these beneficial measures were not advisable. The meaning of the last expression was, of course, universally understood; although the mention of the duties on grain, specially, was avoided. It soon became manifest that the Premier was of opinion that no time ought to be lost in carrying into effect her Majesty's gracious recommendation. On the 27th of January he brought the question before the House, in a speech consisting nearly altogether of details, and enumerative of various articles of import upon which he proposed to abolish or diminish the duties. Compared with the alteration of the duties on grain, the repeal or the relaxation of all the others in the list was, to use the phrase of Mr Ricardo on a much more vital occasion, "not worth half-an-hour's consideration by the House." This truth all present, of course, felt; but Sir Robert affected to feel otherwise, as far as that could be inferred from the mode, method, and style of his address. He avoided, as far as he could, laying any peculiar emphasis on what he pro-

posed to do as to the duties on imported grain and pulse; and taking the subject in its order, discoursed of it with an official gravity and *routine* tone the same as that which he had used with regard to all the rest. In fact, the Premier, with his usual astuteness and caution in such cases, postponed his defence of his conduct until the attack was made: knowing better than most men (as he did) that a defence in anticipation is far more dangerous to him who makes it than absolute silence can be. The mode in which Sir Robert proposed to deal with the duties on grain had, at all events, the merit of simplicity. In lieu of the duties then payable, he proposed a modification of the sliding scale, which was to last till 1849 only, after which all duties, save the nominal duty of one shilling per quarter, were to cease. The proposed scale for wheat was as under:—

Under 48s. per quarter, the duty to be		10s.	*per quarter.*
From 48s. to 49s.	. .	9s.	,,
49s. to 50s.	. .	8s.	,,
50s. to 51s.	. .	7s.	,,
51s. to 52s.	. .	6s.	,,
52s. to 53s.	. .	5s.	,,
53s. and upwards,	.	4s.	,,

By this plan, probably, Sir Robert calculated upon keeping wheat at above fifty shillings for the three years:—but what, after that, he expected the average price to be upon a long series of years does not appear. This was one of the questions which the minister studiously avoided answering; and, curious enough to relate, it is one to which almost every ad-

vocate of a total repeal of protection for tillage has on every occasion evaded replying, as if it were best to leave the future entirely open, and wait upon events to dictate what next. To go into any detail of the technicalities which formed the staple of Sir Robert Peel's address on proposing to the House to make this momentous plunge, would be to add tiresomeness to inutility. The conclusion however is worthy of all attention, in so far as it states the ostensible grounds upon which the ministers acted.

"These, Mr Greene (said Sir Robert in concluding), are the proposals which, on the part of government, I offer for the adjustment—the ultimate adjustment of this question. I cannot appeal to any ungenerous feeling—I cannot appeal to fear, nor to anything which will be calculated to exercise an undue sway over the reason of those to whom these proposals are made. There may be agitation; but it is not one which has reached the great body of the labouring classes, there being amongst them a total absence of all excitement. I admit it is perfectly true that, without danger to the public peace, we might continue the existing duties; therefore, I cannot appeal to fear as a ground for agreeing to those proposals. But, sir, this I do say, there has been a great change of opinion, in the great mass of the community, with respect to the corn-laws. There is between the master manufacturers and the operative classes a common conviction, that did not prevail in 1842 or at any former period, that it will be for the public advantage that these laws should be repealed; and whilst there is that union of sentiment betwixt them, there appears to be, at the same time, a general contentment and loyalty, and a confidence in the justice and impartiality of this House. (Hear, hear.) As far as I can judge, the example which you set, in taking upon yourselves great pecuniary burdens, in order that you

might relieve the labouring classes from the taxation to which they were subjected, has produced the deepest impression and the most beneficial effect on their minds, so that they have a perfect confidence, as I said before, in your justice and wisdom. (Hear, hear, hear.) But, because this *is* a time of peace—because there is a perfect calm, except in so far as the agitation amongst the manufacturers may interrupt it—because you are not subject to any coercion whatever,—I entreat you to bear in mind that this aspect of affairs may change; that we may have to contend with worse harvests than that of this year; and that it may be wise to avail ourselves of the present moment, in order to effect an adjustment, which I believe must ultimately be made, and which cannot be much longer delayed without engendering deep feelings of animosity between different classes of her Majesty's subjects on this score. From a sincere conviction that this settlement is not to be much longer delayed;—that, accompanied by the precautionary measures to which I have referred, it will not inflict injury on the agricultural interests;—from these feelings I should deeply lament, exclusively on public grounds, the failure of the attempt which, at the instance of her Majesty's government on this occasion, I have made to recommend to your calm and dispassionate consideration these proposals; with no other feeling or other interest in the ultimate issue than that they may—to use the words of her Majesty's speech—"Conduce to the promotion of friendly feelings between different classes, to provide additional securities for the maintenance of peace, and to maintain contentment and happiness at home, by adding to the comforts and improving the condition of the great body of the people."

Hansard's Debates, 3*d Series*, vol. lxxxiii. p. 282.

This was sufficiently artful. Whilst it flattered the House, and deprecated all idea of appealing to their fears, it really conveyed the indirect threat of an interminable agitation. A plunge, however, such as that

which was now about to be made, could not be made without provoking great and passionate resistance.

Amongst the most formidable of Sir Robert Peel's opponents was now to be reckoned Mr Benjamin D'Israeli, a gentleman who, though on his first entrance into the House of Commons he did not succeed in making any considerable impression, exhibited afterwards no small share of that talent for which the ministerial leader was so remarkable,—the talent of gaining the ear and conciliating the good-will of its members. Mr D'Israeli, the son of a man of some eminence in the republic of letters, had himself commenced his career in the character of a *littérateur*, in the imaginative department of authorship. He first made himself known to the world as the writer of some novels, made up principally of metaphysics and politics of a somewhat extravagant sort, in which truth and nature were sacrificed to startling novelty and striking effect. As a political adventurer his course had been versatile, tortuous, and irregular. He had at first, as a Whig-radical aspirant, tried to obtain the grim smiles and parsimonious patronage of Mr Hume and the "economy and retrenchment" party. Finding, however, the Radical platform no congenial station for one who was at least as ambitious of place as of reputation, he veered gradually round, and after some political coquetry with the Peel section, finally joined the high Conservative ranks in opposing Sir Robert Peel's policy. It has been asserted that the personal dislike of Peel which, towards the end of Sir Robert's career, Mr D'Israeli took no pains to hide,

was the effect of disappointment, and only appeared after the minister, either fearing his talent or doubting his stability, or both, had received his marked advances with as marked a coldness. Be this as it may, however, the hatred of D'Israeli for Peel seemed to "grow with his growth and strengthen with his strength" as a debater; and, through the last years of Sir Robert's life, D'Israeli never omitted an opportunity of galling him with oratorical attacks, of which keen, trenchant, and witty invective were the staple.

Of solid or real political knowledge, Mr D'Israeli does not seem to possess much share. His speeches exhibit political personality in lieu of political argument; but they are often clever, brilliant, and cuttingly sarcastic, and may be described as consisting of wit and satire admirably wrought up, and embroidered upon a coarse canvass of political commonplace. They in fact partake of the character of his works, in which probability and common sense are always overlaid with paradox, mysticism, and spasmodic strivings after effect, wrought upon a substratum of mere party politics. To Sir Robert Peel, however, the light but envenomed shafts of Mr D'Israeli were more terrible than a heavier weapon would have been. Though an accomplished debater in most respects, he had no talent for extempore repartee. His good things—for good things he often said—were sought for, and kept for the occasion. Hence the keen points of Mr D'Israeli were to him what the poisoned needles of the Borgias were to their victims—things slight indeed but fatal; impossible to be parried, and hardly

to be retaliated. And hence Sir Robert Peel dreaded a tilt with Mr D'Israeli more than an encounter with a more heavily armed adversary. He felt the contest to be an unequal one; and when a burst of laughter and derisive cheers followed some malicious hit of his remorseless enemy, he felt that others saw it to be so.

Mr D'Israeli did not wait for the formal enunciation of the change of ministerial policy before making his assault.* On the very first night of the session he

* On the 22d January, after Sir Robert Peel had completed his ministerial explanation, Mr D'Israeli let fly, amongst others, the following shafts:—

"Sir, the right honourable gentleman has supported a different policy for a number of years. Well do we remember on this side of the House,—perhaps not without a blush,—well do we remember the efforts which we made to raise him to that bench where he now sits. Who does not remember 'the sacred cause of Protection?'—the cause for which sovereigns were thwarted, parliaments dissolved, and a nation taken in,—delightful indeed to have the right honourable gentleman entering into all his confidential details when (to use his courtly language) he 'called' upon his sovereign. Sir, he called on his sovereign; but would his sovereign have called on the right honourable baronet if, in 1841, he had not placed himself, as he then said, at the head of the gentlemen of England? That well known position he took,—a position to be preferred even to the confidence of sovereigns and of courts. It is all very well for the right honourable baronet to take this high-flying course; but I myself shall venture to think,—I say it with great respect to gentlemen on this side of the House and to gentlemen on the other,—I say it without any hope of a party triumph, for I believe I belong to a party that can triumph no more—(cheers from both sides)—for we have nothing left us but the constituencies that we have *not* betrayed—(loud cheers);—but I do think and say that my conception of 'a great statesman' is that of one who represents a great idea,—an idea which leads him to power,—an idea with which he has

attacked the course taken by the Premier with great bitterness; and in this strategy he was ably seconded by others of the same party, who followed him during

identified himself,—an idea which he is to develop,—an idea which he may, and can, and does, impress on the mind of a nation. (Cheers.) That, sir, is my notion of that which constitutes a man a *great* statesman. I care not whether he be a manufacturer or a manufacturer's son. The position is still grand,—I may say heroic. But I care not, sir, what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea,—a mere watcher of the atmosphere,—a man who, as he says himself, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind veers towards a certain quarter, trims to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful minister; but he is no more 'a great statesman' than the man who gets up behind a carriage is 'a great whip!' Both are disciples of progress, to be sure. Both perhaps may get a good place. (Cheers and laughter.) But how far the original momentum is indebted to their powers, and how far their guiding prudence regulates the lash or the rein, it is not necessary for me to notice."

To a man in Sir Robert Peel's position the sarcastic truth of this sally must have been gall and wormwood. The next is still more remorseless in its sidelong invective and bitter irony.

"Sir, there is a difficulty in finding a parallel in any part of history to the position of the right honourable gentleman. The only parallel that I can find is an incident in the late war in the Levant, which was terminated by the policy of the noble lord opposite (Palmerston). I remember when that great struggle was taking place, when the existence of the Turkish empire was at stake,—the late Sultan, a man of great energy and fertile in resources, was determined to fit out an immense fleet to maintain his empire. A vast armament was accordingly collected. It consisted of many of the finest ships that ever were built. The crews were picked men. The officers were the ablest that could be found, and both officers and men were rewarded before they fought. Never did an armament similarly appointed leave the Dardanelles since the days of Solyman the Magnificent. The Sultan personally witnessed the departure of the fleet; and all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedi-

the long debate of twelve nights (an unprecedented term) which sealed the fate of the corn-law. Accusations of treachery of the grossest and basest kind, couched in such language as the usages of parliament would allow, were mercilessly hurled at the head of the Prime-minister; and one member went so far as to say that, had the Duke of Wellington, during the heat of the Spanish Peninsular war, gone over to Napoleon with his staff and some of his best troops, such a treason could not have shocked him more than did the apostasy on this question of the right honourable baronet.

Through this storm, which lasted for twelve days, Sir Robert Peel proceeded with his wonted calm-

tion, as all the muftis here prayed for the success of the last general election! Away went the fleet; but what was the Sultan's consternation when the Lord High Admiral steered at once into the enemy's port! Now, sir, the Lord High Admiral was, on that occasion, it seems, very much misrepresented. (Cheers and laughter.) He too was called a traitor! But he too had the talent of vindicating himself. 'True it is (said he) I *did* place myself at the head of this valiant armada; true it is that my sovereign embraced me; true it is that all the muftis in the empire prayed for my success; but then—I have an objection to war!' I see no use in prolonging the struggle; and the only reason I had for accepting the command of the fleet was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master!' (Continued cheers and laughter.) And, sir, these reasons—offered by a man of great plausibility and of vast adroitness—have had their effect; for—you may be surprised, but I assure you it is the fact, as the gallant officer opposite can testify—that he is at this moment first Lord of the Admiralty under the new *regime*. (Sir C. NAPIER.—I thought he was dead!) The gallant commodore says he is dead; dead he may be; but, at any rate, he wasn't shot for treason!"

Hansard, 3d Series, vol. lxxxiii.

ness, self-possession, courtesy, and complete command of temper. The debate turned upon an amendment of Sir Robert's motion for going into a committee on the tariff, moved by Mr William Miles, to the effect that it be postponed until "this day six months." The Prime-minister did not speak to the amendment until the fifth evening, when he defended his conduct with his usual specious subtlety of logic.

It will be seen that, with his wonted lawyer-like prudence, Sir Robert put the *onus* upon the necessity of the case.

"Whilst I admit (said the Premier) that the course I have pursued must as a natural consequence offend, probably alienate, a great party, I am not the less convinced that any other course would have been ultimately injurious, even to party interests. I know what would have conciliated temporary confidence. (Hear, hear, hear.) It would have been to underrate the danger to Ireland; to invite a united combination for the maintenance of the existing corn-law; to talk about hoisting the flag of protection for native industry; to insist that agricultural protection should be preserved in all its integrity; —by following such a course I should have been sure to have been maintained in power, to have animated and pleased a party, and for a time to have gained their cordial approbation. (Hear, hear.) But the month of May will not arrive without demonstrating that I should thereby have abandoned my duty to my country,—to my sovereign,—ay, and to the Conservative party. I had and have the firm persuasion that the present temper of the public mind, the state of public feeling and of public opinion, with respect to the corn-laws, would, independently of all adventitious circumstances, make the defence of the corn-laws a most difficult task. But with such a calamity as that which is impending in Ireland, it was utterly irrecon-

cilable with my feelings to urge the landed interest to commit themselves to a conflict for the maintenance, inviolate, of a law which attaches at this present moment a duty of 17s. to the quarter of wheat. (Hear, hear.) What were the facts that came under the cognizance of my right honourable friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, charged with the responsibility of providing for the public peace, and saving millions from the calamity of starvation? We were assured that in one part of this empire there are 4,000,000 of the Queen's subjects dependent for subsistence upon a certain article of food. We knew that on that article of food no reliance can be placed. It was difficult to say what was the extent of the danger;—what would be the progress of the disease; and what the amount of deficiency in the supply of that article of food. Surely you will make allowance for those who were charged with the heaviest responsibility, if their worst anticipations should be realized by the event. We saw in the distance the gaunt form of famine, and the spectre of disease following the train of famine. Was it not, I ask, our duty to our country—ay, and our duty to the party that supported us, to avert the odious charge of indifference and of neglect of timely precautions? It is absolutely necessary, before you come to a final decision, that you should understand this Irish case. You must do so. The reading of letters may be distasteful to you; but you shall have no ground for imputing it to me that I left you in ignorance of a danger that I believe to be imminent. I may have lost your confidence; nor will I try to regain it at the expense of truth. I cannot conciliate favour by any expression of regret for the course I have taken. (Hear, hear, hear.) So far from it, I declare, in the face of this House, that the day of my public life to which I look back with the greatest satisfaction and pride is that 1st of November last, when I offered to take the responsibility of issuing an order in council to open the ports and trust to you for approval and indemnity. I wished then that, by the first

packet which sailed after the first of November, the news might have gone that "the ports were open." (Hear, hear, hear.) The primary objects of such a measure would, of course, have been to increase the supply of food, although other collateral advantages might have flowed from it. Had we opened the ports, and had our anticipations proved incorrect, I believe that the generosity of parliament would have protected us from censure. (Hear, hear.) But what is the fact? During the latter part of December, and in January, there was a temporary suspension of alarm. But after the opinions we had received from men eminent for science, I never could share in the sanguine hope that there would be a sufficiency or abundance of food;—that the potato disease was exaggerated, and that we might safely trust to the existing supplies. I felt, on the contrary, that the time was coming when the opinions of these individuals would be justified. And what are the facts? I must read to you some of the communications received, not so much for the vindication of government as for your guidance of your own future course. I tell you it is not right that I should leave you in ignorance of the real facts of this case. (Hear, hear, hear, from all sides of the House.) It is true the present proposition is not a legal suspension of all duties; but it is a virtual suspension. It comprehends the removal of the duty on maize and rice; the reduction of the duty, to a nominal amount, on barley and on oats; and the reduction of the duty on wheat from 17s. to 4s. And before you decide either on rejecting or delaying this measure, hear,—hear and consider the reports which the last few days have brought from Ireland."

At this stage of his argument, Sir Robert proceeded to read to the House various letters, written by various individuals from every part of Ireland. The opinions they expressed as to the certainty and awful extent of the coming peril to the lives of the miserable Irish

poor population, were fatally and terribly verified by subsequent events; though in England, at that moment, few really suspected the full extent of the desolation that was approaching with slow, solemn, and noiseless step, like the spectre of famine as painted by poets. Having concluded this part of his arduous task, Sir Robert continued his argument as follows:—

"And now I come to that second consideration, from which I said that I would not shrink. After the suspension of the existing law, and the admission of foreign imported grain for a period of several months, how do you propose to deal with the existing corn-law? That is the question which a minister is bound to consider who is to advise the suspension of the corn-laws. Now, I must say, my conviction is so strong, that it would be utterly impossible, after establishing freedom of trade in corn for a period of seven or eight months or more, to give a guarantee that the existing law should, at the end of that time, again come into operation, that I could not encourage the delusive hope of such a result. (Hear.) I know it may be and is said that, after a temporary suspension of the law, the law itself would revive by its own operation, and that to restore its vigour no especial enactment would be necessary. Now, I think it is an utter misapprehension of the state of public opinion to suppose it possible that, after this country for eight months shall have tasted of freedom of trade in corn, you could revive either by the tacit operation of the law itself, or even by new and special enactment, the existing corn-law. Surely, sir, the very fact of suspension would itself be a condemnation of the law. (Cheers.) It would demonstrate that the law which professed, by a total reduction of duty when grain reached a certain price, to provide security against a scarcity, had failed in one of its most essential parts. Yet,

after this, you are to insist upon a revival of this law! Now, let me ask, having reached this point, would you revive the existing law in all its provisions? Would you, I ask, refuse the admission of maize at lower duties? At present the duty on it is all but prohibitory. Do not suppose that those who advised suspension overlooked the consideration of the consequences of suspension—overlooked the bearing it must have upon the state of the present law, and upon the question of future protection. At the expiration of suspension, will you resolve to revive the existing law? or will you come to the proposition of another new and modified law? If you revive the existing, every defect, however manifest, must be preserved! Now, by the existing law, the duty on maize varies inversely, not with the price of maize, but with the price of barley. We want maize—the price of barley is falling—yet we can get no maize, because there is a prohibitory duty on maize in consequence of the lower price of barley! (Hear, hear, hear!) 'Oh! but (say some) we *will* have a little alteration in the law. We will certainly provide for the case of maize.' Now do not, I beseech you, disregard public feeling in matters of this kind. It is not right, I own, that mere feeling should overbear the deliberate, pure convictions of reason; but when questions of food are concerned, public feeling never can be safely disregarded. In the course of last session, a notice *was* given of a motion that maize should be imported duty-free. (Hear, hear, hear!) But why? Because it was the interest of the farmer to have maize cheap as a food for cattle. (Laughter and cheers). I ask, Do you indeed think it possible to devise a new corn-law, the leading principle of which should be, that maize should come in free of duty, because the admission of that article would enable the farmer to feed his cattle and pigs with it; but that there are other articles used for consumption by human beings—and in respect to them, the law shall be maintained in all its force? Do you advise me to commit you to fight that battle? I am

assuming now, that the necessity for the suspension of the law has been established. That suspension having taken place, would you deliberately advise the government, for the sake of public interests, or for the sake of party interests, to give a pledge, either that the existing corn-law, at the expiration of suspension, should be revived unaltered; or that there should be some trumpery modification of it, for the especial benefit of feeders of pigs and cattle? Are you insensible to the real state of public opinion on this question? Are you insensible to the altered convictions of many of your own party? Could I, with any safety, rely upon your cordial or unanimous support, as a great party, for the redemption of such a pledge as that? Look to the change of opinion that has taken place, not amongst mere politicians, which you are apt to attribute to some selfish or corrupt motive; but look at the opinions now expressed, of the sincerity of which conclusive proof has been given by some of the most honourable men that ever sat upon these benches. (Hear, hear, hear!) Did my noble friend, Lord Ashley, vacate his seat for the county of Dorset from any interested or corrupt motive? Did Mr Sturt, or Mr William Patten, avow their change of opinion from interested or corrupt motives? Did Mr Tatton Egerton offer to vacate his seat for Cheshire, or Lord Henniker his seat for Suffolk, from any other motive than a real conviction that the time was come for the adjustment of the question of corn-laws? Did Mr Dawney vacate his seat from any such motive? Did Mr Charteris, a young and rising member of this House — glowing with as high and honourable a spirit as ever animated the breast of an English gentleman—did he abandon his seat for Gloucestershire, and withdraw from this conflict, from any corrupt or self-interested feeling? No; and surely these afford proofs, that the minister who should suspend the law, and give a guarantee to revive it whenever the period for suspension should pass away, would have enormous, insuperable difficulties to encounter."

That this powerful appeal must have told strongly upon all the waverers in the House cannot be doubted. In some other portions of his address, the Premier was less fortunate. He must have relied far upon the lack of knowledge in his audience when, having asserted that, since the war, rents had been higher with a lower price for wheat, he expected them to infer that, under a still lower price of grain, rents might rise higher, as if one of these events had any connexion with the other. Sir Robert knew, or ought to have known, that the scale of rental depends in the main upon the scale of profit arising from other modes of investing money. If commercial profits be very high, rents must recede, because moneyed men will not then invest capital in farming, and the competition for land ceases. *E conversô*, when the profits of commerce are depressed, rents rise, because trading capital is attracted to the land; and this was the case after 1819, when Sir Robert's own money-law created a decline of profits that has never altogether ceased since that time. Equally unhappy was his strange assertion, that the price of wheat in this country had some mysterious tendency to decline irrespective of all legislation. To prove this, he quoted the following tabular statement of the average prices of wheat for five decennial periods, forgetting altogether to advert to the truth that, during the ten years ending with 1815, the price of wheat was nominally doubled, or nearly doubled, by the depreciation of the paper currency in which the wheat was paid for, and not from any real augmentation of the value of the grain. The table is as follows:—

	Per Quarter. s.	d.
Average of the 10 years ending 1805, . . .	81	10½
Ditto ditto . . 1815, . . .	97	6
Ditto ditto . . 1825, . . .	78	8
Ditto ditto . . 1835, . . .	56	7
Ditto ditto . . 1845, . . .	57	11

On a comparison with the money of this day of the depreciated money of the first three periods, the real average values were probably about 45s. for the first two, and about 60s. for the third, the two remaining being nearly though not quite correct—a consideration which oversets the Premier's whole argument. It is true Sir Robert felt it necessary to deny that depreciation to this extent ever existed, implicated as he was in the enormous blunders perpetrated in 1810 and in 1819, and that in this very speech he ventured so far as to call it *ten per cent.* only! But when he did this, he knew perfectly well that no human being whose opinion on this subject was worth a straw would believe him; and he merely threw it out to impose upon the ignorant part of his audience, who unhappily formed the great majority of that audience.

Sir Robert concluded his address with the following forcible appeal to the feelings of those around him; in the course of which, it must be noted, however, that he ascribes to some mysterious law of Providence the numerous reactions which have arisen out of his own money-laws, omitting the instructive fact, that in France, where the currency is mostly metallic, and where the bank generally holds gold and silver to an amount beyond that of its paper circulation, this mysterious law of Providence providentially does not operate, money-

panics like those in Great Britain being unknown; whilst in the United States, where, amidst many valuable institutions, a system of banking and currency has been suffered to grow up even worse than that patronized by Sir Robert Peel, money-panics are more frequent than they are here, and their consequences more extraordinary and more destructive than those resulting from similar scenes as enacted in this island.

"This night, then," said the Premier, in conclusion, "if on this night the debate shall close, you will have to decide what are the principles by which your commercial policy is to be regulated. Most earnestly, from a deep conviction founded, not upon the limited experience of three years alone, but upon the experience of the results of every relaxation of restriction or prohibition, I counsel you to set the example of liberality to other countries. Act thus, and it will be in perfect consistence with the course that you have hitherto taken; and thus you will provide an additional guarantee for the continued contentment, and happiness, and wellbeing of the people. Act thus, and you will have done whatever human sagacity can do for the promotion of commercial prosperity.

"You may, however, fail; your precautions may, nevertheless, be unavailing. They may give no certain assurance that mercantile or manufacturing prosperity will continue without interruption. It seems to be incident to great prosperity that there shall be a reverse, that the time of depression shall follow the season of excitement and success (hear, hear, hear!) That time of depression must perhaps return, and its return may be coincident with scarcity caused by unfavourable seasons. Gloomy winters, like those of 1841 and 1842, may again set in. Are those winters effaced from your memory? Can they be so? *From mine they never can be effaced.* Surely you cannot have forgotten with what earnestness and sincerity you re-echoed

the deep feelings of a gracious Queen, when at the opening and the close of each session she expressed the warmest sympathy with the sufferings of her people, and the warmest admiration of their heroic fortitude!

"These sad times may recur: 'The years of plenteousness may have ended,' and 'the years of dearth may have come,' and again you may have to offer the unavailing expressions of sympathy, and the urgent exhortations to patient resignation. Commune with your own hearts and answer me this question—Will your assurances of sympathy be less consolatory—will your exhortations to patience be less impressive, if with your willing consent the corn-laws shall have then ceased to exist? Will it be no satisfaction to you to reflect that, by your own act, you have been relieved from the grievous responsibility of regulating the supply of food? Will you not then cherish with delight the reflection that, in this the present hour of comparative prosperity, yielding to no clamour, impelled by no fear except indeed that provident fear which is the mother of safety, you had anticipated the evil day, and, long before its advent, had trampled on every impediment to the free circulation of the Creator's bounty? And when you are again exhorting a suffering people to fortitude under their privations—when you are telling them 'These are the chastenings of an all-wise and merciful Providence sent for some inscrutable but still just and beneficent purpose—it may be to humble our pride or punish our unfaithfulness, or to impress us with the sense of our own nothingness and dependence on His mercy;' when you are thus addressing your suffering fellow-subjects, and thus encouraging them to bear without repining the dispensations of Providence, may God grant that, by your decision this night, you may have laid in store for yourselves the consolation of reflecting that such calamities are in truth the dispensations of Providence; that they have not been caused, have not been aggravated, by laws of man restricting, in the hour of scarcity and deepest need, the supply of food."

If Sir Robert really expected the debate to end on the night of his address, he was sadly deceived. Every member of the House who possessed in the slightest degree the gift of utterance seemed determined either to pour forth regrets or maledictions over departed Protection. The debate accordingly dragged its slow length along until the twelfth evening, when the House divided upon the original motion; and 337 voting in the affirmative against 240 in the negative, gave Sir Robert a majority of 97, which was decisive of the whole question.

Many persons have deemed the conduct of the Duke of Wellington in 1829, as well as in 1846, as the most remarkable portion of the extraordinary political changes of these years; but wonder here is ill placed. Amongst the other singular maxims of the iron Duke's political creed, was one which put him entirely at the mercy of a man like Sir Robert Peel; and this was his notion, that if once it could be shown that anything was necessary for the service of the king,—meaning thereby necessary to save the crown from a serious embarrassment,—all other considerations were to be held to be of no account. To a man with Sir Robert's power of specious logic, this, on any great question, could not be other than an easy task; and hence, whenever the political somerset was to be thrown, the plain soldier was a mere child in the hands of the practised politician, and followed the leader of the House of Commons much as the clown of the circus does the chief posture-master of that amusing establishment. Thus Sir Robert Peel, through

the instrumentality of the Duke, was always sure of the House of Lords, the majority of which reposed implicit confidence in the stern common sense and plain directness of the great soldier, without perceiving that their Achilles also had a vulnerable heel, which, though unheeded by them, was but too well known to Sir Robert Peel.

With the repeal of the corn-laws Sir Robert Peel's political power ended for the time, as he himself doubtless anticipated. He must have known, as every man capable of thinking knew, that by this measure the high Conservative party would be alienated more completely than they were by the repeal of the penal laws against Catholics in 1829; and a short time only was required for proving the truth of these anticipations. Next in importance, in the eyes of the public, to the repeal of the corn-laws, were the measures proposed by government to suppress turbulence in Ireland, which had been increased by the scarcity and higher prices of food rather than the contrary. There had indeed been three or four nights of useless bickering upon the interminable question of national education; and a motion had, in spite of Sir James Graham, been originated by Mr Etwall and carried, for a committee of "Inquiry into the Administration of the Amended Poor-law in the Andover Union," where a series of congenial atrocities had been providentially brought to light, calculated to raise, as they did raise, the indignation and deep disgust of every man worthy the name of Englishman. The Irish Disturbances bill, however, next after the question of Protection, was

uppermost in public expectation, because upon that question it was believed, not without reason, that Sir Robert Peel would be deserted by most of the high Conservative party, and left unassisted by the "Liberals," to whom the prospect of office, to be enjoyed once more, began now to hold out irresistible allurements to the unseating of the minister, by the aid of his angry and alienated friends the Protectionist Conservatives, who, after exhausting every device to impede, modify, or destroy Sir Robert Peel's arrangements, were at last compelled to become the only sincere mourners at the obsequies of Protection.

The course of this coercion-bill for Ireland had been singular. It was introduced into the House of Commons by government during the earlier days of the session. On its introduction, it was of course opposed by the O'Connells and by the other ultra-democratic Irish members, but not by the Whig party, who, having had considerable practice in the manufacture of similar bills for the same unfortunate patient, were disinclined to say much against this particular specimen of an ancient regimen. Owing to the debates on the tariff, the progress of this Irish bill was delayed from month to month; and in the mean time the growing famine and destruction of the potato-crop was producing a too plentiful supply of crime and bloodshed in the shape of agrarian outrages and murders. This was only the natural sequel to the dreadful state of destitution of food, towards which the miserable Irish population were now travelling. Where ejectment for non-payment of rent from his little holding

is all but equivalent to a sentence of death, by slow starvation, upon a man and his family, men placed in a position so dreadful, acting upon that law of nature which places self-preservation first in the list of motives, will escape the ejectment by even murdering the agent. The failure of the potato-plant was rapidly aggravating this state of affairs, by diminishing the means of the poor peasant to pay rent; and hence, on Sir Robert Peel's pressing forward his bill to coerce the agitated Irish in the month of May, he was in possession of a list of outrages much more serious than any that had occurred prior to January, when the bill was first brought in by leave of the House. But in the mean time the opponents of Sir Robert and his measures had, like the outrages themselves, multiplied!

The Whig party having now within their reach an instrument by means of which the Peel cabinet might be dislodged from Downing Street and Whitehall, began to discover that the bill was not adapted to the crisis; and the Protectionists, desirous of the aid of the Liberals to wreak their revenge upon Sir Robert, now made the same discovery. The consequence of this tacit coalition was, that a violent opposition to the Prime minister's measure arose on both sides of the House, in the course of which he was assailed with the most virulent vituperation. The leaders in thiss trategy of invective were Mr D'Israeli and Lord George Bentinck, the latter of whom might, in some respects, be called a more extraordinary adventurer on the field of politics than was the successful novelist.

Born of a noble family and having ample means, he had for many years misapplied talents by no means despicable to the pursuits of the turf, and was a distinguished character at Newmarket, Doncaster, Derby, or wherever the locality may be, of a game at which those who win must win by being, intentionally or not, the confederates, and those who lose must lose by being, innocently or not, the victims of gamblers of the most unprincipled class. Being a fluent speaker, and a man of some readiness and some energy, Lord George was induced by those members of the aristocracy who distrusted and disliked Sir Robert Peel, to transfer himself from the jockey-club to the House of Commons, and to become the mouthpiece and champion of protection and high conservative principles.

In the exercise of this his new vocation Lord George was not very scrupulous; and now when the high protectionist party broke with Sir Robert, the debate became a war of personalities directed against the minister, rather than the discussion of a measure affecting the sister kingdom. Amongst other accusations intended to goad and irritate his feelings, was revived that of his having intrigued against Mr Canning, on the pretext that Mr Canning's being in power must help the claims of the Irish Catholics, although he (Sir Robert) had before that made up his mind that Catholic Emancipation could not be long evaded. In short, it was more than insinuated that by these intrigues Mr Canning's life and administration were brought at once to a premature end. From this accusation probability revolts. Sir Robert (then Mr

Peel) himself solemnly denied the charge when originally made; and surely there were ample reasons for his declining to join the Canning administration, which, constituted and supported as it was, could not, in his view, be other than transient. Such was the spirit in which, on the part of the Protectionists, this assault was conducted. Their liberal allies carried on a more masked but not more generous warfare. Of their compliments to the Premier they were profuse; but of his bill "to prevent disturbances in Ireland," "'twas true, 'twas pity, and pity 'twas 'twas true," they could only say it was a total mistake, and vote for it they could not, and vote against it they must.

All this "candied courtesy," strangely contrasted as it was with the violent invective of the minister's quondam friends, pointed to one only result, that result having, no doubt, been for some time foreseen by Sir Robert Peel. The parliamentary tactics displayed on this occasion were very extraordinary, and not a little amusing. The Whigs, seeing power and patronage within their grasp, were fully determined to grasp them; and the high conservative party were equally resolved to drive the ministry from office, without caring much who were to be their successors. But in nice and critical cases, when the leech bites, the where and the how are of vital consequence sometimes; and so it was here. The tariff-bill was still before the House of Lords, and a dissolution of the ministry would have put it into great jeopardy. It became, therefore, necessary for the liberal and free-trading party to postpone the decision of the Irish

disturbances bill until the tariff was passed by the Peers; and this they did by repeated postponements under one pretence or another, and by at last continuing the adjourned debate from night to night; and with such nicety of calculation was this curious manœuvre conducted, that the division on the second reading of the "disturbances bill" took place on the sixth night of the debate, within little more than an hour and a half after the tariff had finally been voted by the House of Peers. It was decisive: 292 members voted against the second reading, and 219 for it, giving a majority against the Peel administration of 73; and thus bringing Sir Robert Peel's political power to its final close, to the regret, unquestionably, of the majority of the nation, who had lost all confidence in the once popular Whig party, and who were equally averse to the policy of the Protectionist Conservatives.

On the 29th June, Sir Robert Peel made his last address in the character of a minister of the crown, and explained at some length the causes of the retirement of the cabinet. They were sufficiently obvious: and the speech contains nothing beyond the usual professions and claims (some of them, especially as regards Oregon, questionable enough) made by official men when quitting power, excepting towards the conclusion, when the following singular disclaimer occurs. It will doubtless be interpreted by different persons very differently; but at the same time, no one can deny that, coming as it did from a statesman of the character of Sir Robert Peel, it is, to say the least of it, curious and startling.

"I said before (continued Sir Robert, in concluding his latest official address), and I said truly, that, in proposing our measures of commercial policy, I had no wish to rob *others* of the credit justly due to them. I must say with reference to honourable gentlemen opposite, as I say with reference to ourselves, that neither of us is the party which is justly entitled to the credit of them. There has been a combination of parties generally opposed to each other; and that combination and the influence of government have led to their ultimate success. But the name which ought to be associated with the success of these measures is not the name of the noble lord, the organ of the party of which he is the leader, nor is it mine. (Hear, hear, hear!) The name which ought to be and will be associated with the success of these measures, is the name of one who, acting I believe from pure and from disinterested motives, has with untiring energy made appeals to our reason, and has enforced those appeals with an eloquence the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned. The name which ought to be chiefly associated with the success of these measures is the name of RICHARD COBDEN."

From what evils might not Sir Robert Peel have saved his country, had he, in like manner, in 1819, disclaimed the paternity of the fatal cash-payments act; and, freeing himself, at once, of both responsibility and the necessity of adhesion, attributed that measure of mischief and misery to its real author, DAVID RICARDO.

CHAPTER IX.

Lord John Russell's Ministry—Its Difficulties—Railway Bubble bursts—Great Distress—The Potato perishes generally—Dreadful State of Ireland—Famine—Mr O'Connell quits Ireland and dies—Ports opened—Emormous Imports of Grain—Panic of 1847—The Act of 1844 suspended—The Crisis passes—Secret Committee—Austria seizes Cracow—Mr Hume proposes to stop the Russo-Dutch Loan—Ministers shrink back—Sir Robert Peel aids the Ministry—His Motives—French Troubles—Their Origin—Revolution of 1848—French Republic acknowledged—Navigation Laws attacked—Change of Circumstances causing this—Jew-bill negatived—Sir Robert votes for it—Mr Bulwer driven from Madrid—Sir Robert Peel again aids the Ministry—Austria rebukes Lord Palmerston—Terrible Condition of Ireland—Extraordinary Proposals of Sir Robert Peel—Ministers adopt them—Irish Encumbered Estates Act passes—Its extraordinary Details—General Expectation of Sir Robert Peel's Accession to Office—Don Pacifico—Ridiculous Quarrel with France—The French Ambassador quits London—Conduct of the French Authorities—The Ministers succumb to France—Vote of Censure by the Peers—Mr Roebuck's Motion in Support of Ministers—Sir Robert opposes it, and blames the Palmerston Policy—Sir Robert is thrown from his Horse—His Death—Deep Impression made by it—His private Character—Analysis of his public Conduct.

THE few years of public life which now remained to Sir Robert Peel form an anti-climax, and must be treated succinctly and briefly. Were the annalist to be guided by Sir Robert's own expressions, it might be concluded that the ex-minister deemed the dissolution

of his cabinet in June 1846 as the close of his official career, and was content so to deem it. But his conduct was, in some degree, at variance with his words. He might indeed rejoice in this relief from the responsibilities of an office which every year seemed to surround with fresh difficulties; but the real tranquillity of a private station he never sought. He was still the same assiduous member of the House of Commons that he had ever been. He sat there no longer, certainly, as the chief and political helmsman of a large and powerful party. But then, as in 1831–2, he might be seen, heading his small but faithful band of followers, and with a practised eye watching the course of events as they arose, and circumspectly noting changes, trivial to the ordinary observer, but full of meaning to the finished politician.

In order to fulfil the purpose of this biography, which is to give a clear and intelligible view of Sir Robert Peel's political acts, of the causes which influenced them, and the consequences to which they are leading, or have led, it will only be necessary to glance rapidly at some of the principal occurrences of the last few years during which he ceased to hold any political office. The reins of government had now, once more, passed into the hands of the Whig party, although they held them, comparatively speaking, with a palzied hand. The office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, recently filled by Sir Robert Peel, was assigned to a personage of whom it might well be said "quantô mutatus ab illô"—that is to say, by Sir Charles Wood: and hardly had he taken possession of his office,

when a new series of pecuniary difficulties began, which not only evinced his unfitness for the perilous post he occupied, but also the utter futility of that measure of his predecessor which was intended to shield the country from the panics in the money-market, to which it now seems to be periodically doomed.

It has been already shown that the terrible collapse, in agriculture as well as manufactures and general trade, which followed the first crash of the joint-stock banks, and under which the nation was visibly sinking in 1841, when the Peel ministry was formed, was at length, and just in time, alleviated by the extraordinary speculation in railroads, which for credulity on one side, and shameless imposture and fraud on the other, surpassed even the scenes arising out of Law of Lauriston's Mississippi hoax in France, and those enacted during the South Sea Bubble and the bubble speculations of 1824–5, in this country. It will probably be considered as one of the deeper stains on the modern annals of Great Britain, that the parliamentary retribution which overtook those who participated in the South Sea frauds, did not overtake the still more shameless offenders of 1844-5-6.* Such however was not the case. In this instance, the

* In the former case, the participators in the delusion, for the most part, were severely punished. Mr Aislabie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was sent to the Tower, fined £40,000, and expelled the House. Mr Craggs, one of the Secretaries of State, and the well-known friend of the poet Pope, whose name was down for £659,000, was mulcted heavily, and died, ostensibly of small-pox, but really by poison; whilst his son, and various others, were similarly visited with the indignant censure of the House, and died in exile.

comparatively innocent suffered, the really guilty profited. The first reaction took place in the summer of 1846; and confidence once staggered, the prices of shares fell rapidly; a panic amongst the holders followed, and the ruin that ensued was great and terrible.

Worse however remained behind. The disease of the potato-plant, which had already plunged Ireland into suffering unprecedented, re-appeared in the autumn and winter of 1846-7 with greater virulence than ever; and the scenes that followed in 1847 baffle all powers of description. Millions of the poor Irish were exposed to the terrible fate of perishing from actual want or the diseases consequent on insufficient food; and by the census of 1851 it was ascertained that a million and a half of persons, of all ages, must have disappeared; either starved to death, or killed by typhus and other fevers, or else having left the country to escape that fate. The world was horrified by this shocking catastrophe, to which there is nothing similar on record, and every country was ransacked for provisions to send to Ireland. The ministry opened the ports immediately for the admission of every description of grain and pulse; and large sums were voted to assist unfortunate Ireland in this her agony.

Two other remarkable events soon followed this astounding occurrence: one was the death of Mr O'Connell, whose strength and spirits had declined visibly from the period of his conviction and incarceration, and who now, unable to face the dreadfully changed circumstances of his country, fled to Italy,

and died on his road to Rome, broken-hearted and desperate in fortune. The other was a monetary panic, which all but induced a general bankruptcy, and which compelled the ministers to suspend the operation of Sir Robert Peel's Bank Act of 1844, in order to avert that catastrophe. This latter event was clearly foreseen, and confidently foretold, by the few who thoroughly understood the subject, nearly twelve months before it actually came to pass. In fact, as soon as the almost total rot in the potato crop, in the autumn and winter of 1846, was ascertained, it became a matter of certainty that the Bank Act of 1844 would be put into a crucible out of which it could not come unscathed. It was clear that every particle of provisions procurable anywhere would come to England from all parts of the globe; and that, as the countries supplying the bread-stuffs thus suddenly wanted would not take manufactures in payment for the amount, the balance must go in silver and gold. Against the probable drain thus necessitated it was, months before the crisis, anticipated the Bank could not stand without aid from government; and the prediction proved correct.

Throughout the autumn of 1846 and the winter and spring of 1847, the speculation in grain and provisions was immense. The bullion in the Bank, on the 29th August 1846, when the directors, abandoned by their usual foresight and caution, reduced their rate of discount from 3½ to 3 per cent., was stated to amount to £16,366,000, which, probably, seemed to these gentlemen sufficient to set them above fate and

fortune.* In January 1847 the drain upon the Bank began to be severe and continuous; and in April, the consequence was, that from the measures which, under the stringent provisions of the Act of 1844, the directors could not but take, alarm because excessive, and deputations were actually sent to Sir Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to urge government to relax the provisions of the Act, which if adhered to, men began to feel, must wreck the entire credit of the country in order (as it was stated) "to preserve the convertibility of the Bank of England note!"

Neither the government nor directors were, however, alive to the full extent of the danger. A slight pause in the demand for gold taking place after April, although the import of grain and provisions was going on to a prodigious extent, Sir Charles Wood was stolid enough to flatter himself that the ordeal was past. He was soon undeceived. The metallic drain set in with redoubled violence, and towards autumn it began to be quite palpable to all who had eyes, that, if the system of Sir Robert Peel were adhered to, "the convertibility of the bank-note" might indeed possibly be "preserved," but only at the expense of a universal stoppage and a convulsion; for that was the price that must assuredly have been paid. In October the crisis came. In the beginning of that month, the bank bullion was down to £8,000,000, which under the Peel regulation was insufficient to enable the directors to circulate a suffi-

* *Vide First Report on Commercial Distress*, by the Secret Committee in 1848. James Morris's Evidence, p. 203. *Question* 2658.

ciency of paper to support credit, and at the same time to have a reserve of notes sufficient to secure them against possible demands. This requires three millions; but we have the evidence of Mr Morris, the governor, that in London their reserve was curtailed to little more than half of that sum.* Such a position of affairs manifestly could not continue. The bank-notes in circulation were obviously too few to support commerce and commercial credit. Any considerable further abstraction must have carried ruin and dismay over the whole country.

And now came that solution of the problem which all men of common sense expected. The bankers in London met, and came to a resolution to withdraw their balances if nothing were done: a threat under which (in spite of the strange assertions of the governor and deputy-governor) the cabinet, Sir Robert Peel, and the court of directors quailed at once. To have saved the bank under such a demand as that, the directors' only means was a sale of stock or of exchequer bills. But

* "*Question* 2881. Supposing the London bankers had been, from the pressure upon them, obliged to withdraw a large amount of the balances, which I believe equalled pretty nearly the amount of your reserve on the 22d October, what would have been the effect?—On the 22d October, the reserve in London was £1,600,025, and in the country £776,447, making together £2,376,472. The bankers' balances were £1,774,472. Supposing these balances had been withdrawn from us in the course of business, we should have had an opportunity of going into the market, and by selling securities we should have *strengthened ourselves by taking notes out of the market*, and by that means have met the bankers' demand."

First Report on Commercial Distress, 1848, p. 221.

all securities were nearly unsaleable, and these bills were then at a discount of 35s.; and who was to buy them under such a position of monetary affairs? But supposing the sale possible, an abstraction of two millions more from the bank's circulation, to be locked up in bankers' tills until the panic was past, must have fatally augmented that panic, accelerated a general run for gold, and spread consternation and stoppage over the country, where the banks were already at the last gasp, generally speaking. This Lord John Russell, Sir Charles Wood, and Sir Robert Peel, as well as the bank directors, now all saw; and the result was a letter, signed by the two former personages, authorizing the directors to violate the Act of 1844!

This letter was written on Friday the 22d of October; and the directors, being informed of it, acted upon it on Saturday the 23d October, although the letter was not publicly promulgated in form until Monday the 25th October. The effect was immediate; for in forty-eight hours panic was at an end throughout the entire kingdom. Every one was aware that the bank had in her coffers £8,000,000, which would, now that the absurd law of 1844 was relaxed, have stood a drain, probably of six months more, without producing any excessive alarm, either in the breasts of the directors or of the mercantile community.

It must have been expected by ordinary observers that this exposure of its worse than worthlessness would have sealed the fate, at least, of the Bank Act of 1844:—but never were such thinkers more mistaken. On the contrary, notwithstanding the patent

fact that the ruin and bankruptcy of the autumn of 1847 were mainly to be ascribed to the operation of this act, every human being connected with the moneyed interest, or with the political economist party, seemed, when examined before the committee of inquiry, to do his best to attribute the panic and its effects to any cause but the real one; and to make out that the celebrated letter of Lord John Russell and Sir Charles Wood was a superfluous piece of interference, although it unquestionably saved the country from a general cessation of credit and probably a state of barter. The reason of this is sufficiently obvious. The Act of 1844 was held by its advocates and described by them, with the same rashness that characterized the blunders of 1819, as the "complement" or crowning addition to the original cash-payments act. To have thrown this act overboard would therefore have materially shaken that of which it was intended to be the crowning ornament; and rather than do that, the whole school of bankers, capitalists, money-brokers, and political economists were contented to defend a thing absolutely indefensible either by political economy or common sense. All men, not directly interested in holding the contrary, however, saw from that day forward, that this act only adds to the perils of the existing mixed currency; and that the only way, if bank-notes are to be convertible at all, to decrease that risk, is to diminish the quantity of circulating paper, by raising the amount or denomination of the note, and thus increase the comparative quantity of circulating gold coin. In France, where the bank

does not issue notes for any sum under 500 *francs*, panics of this kind are unknown.

The country was now to enter upon another course of collapse (the fourth since 1819), and to trust to the chapter of accidents again for relief. The consequences of this collapse were visible to all in the next year 1848; but, in the meantime, the monetary jeopardy into which the export of gold was putting all our domestic relations, was, as usual, accompanied by a foreign aggression, and one of the most galling and insulting description. At the peace of 1815, it had been stipulated and assented to by the five powers, England, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France, that Poland should be an independent kingdom, and not incorporated with Russia; and that the town and province of Cracow should be a free *entrepôt* for commodities, similar to Hamburg and other free Germanic towns. In 1831, after the Poles revolted, Russia abrogated the portion of the treaty which prevented her incorporating Poland as a Muscovite province; but the commercial freedom of Cracow still remained intact. The free *entrepôt* of Cracow had, however, long been held as a nuisance by the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian Courts. They complained that it was a sanctuary for political conspirators and anarchists, and a station for revolutionary agents, whose aim was to spread anarchical doctrines over their dominions. Seeing, in 1846, that a complication of domestic troubles was coming upon this country, arising from the total break-down of the railway bubbles and the famine in Ireland; and see-

ing also that France was alienated from England, by the transactions in Syria first, and in Spain afterwards, the three powers resolved to extinguish the freedom of Cracow without further ceremony; which they did, without communicating either with France or England, who were parties to its establishment.

Next to the confiscation of the Vixen and her cargo, this was the most deliberate insult that had been offered to England since the termination of hostilities in 1815; and it caused a deep sensation. As soon as the outrage became known, it had been protested against by Lord Palmerston, the Whig minister for foreign affairs; and this protest was alluded to in the speech from the throne on the opening of the session of 1847; but the allusion was unaccompanied by any recommendation of further proceedings. On the 4th March, however, Mr Hume brought before the House of Commons four resolutions; of which the first three stated very succinctly the stipulations of the treaty of Vienna, upon which the repayment to Russia of a certain portion of the old Russo-Dutch debt was undertaken by England, in concert with Holland and Belgium, then united. The fourth stating the opinion of the House, that, as the extinction of the free city of Cracow was a deliberate violation of that treaty, and that as these payments rested on Russia's adhesion, they should now cease and determine. Lord John Russell's government, as a matter of course, resisted the adoption of these resolutions; but so strong was the feeling throughout the country against this act of barefaced despotism, and so marked was the insult to England,

that, had not Sir Robert Peel and his friends aided government very strongly, the danger was considerable; and Sir Robert's conduct proved that he thought it so. His own position was so awkward, that he might have been excused had he abstained from either speaking or voting on the question. But the position was too critical and the exigence too grave to permit this. For him to oppose the government was to put it in the power of the enemies of both to overturn it, or seriously embarrass it, by voting on the popular side on the mere construction of a treaty. He accordingly waved all difficulties and supported Lord John Russell's views, although he had, when Holland was separated from Belgium, opposed Lord Grey's government on this very same question, as far as the construction of the treaty of Vienna was concerned.

The ground he took on this occasion was, that the opposite construction, as well as the appropriation of the money, were now legalized by an act of parliament; and went so far as to say, that by that act we were morally bound to go on paying even were Russia at actual war with us; a doctrine so opposed to common sense as to create wonder at his venturing to advocate it. The debate was protracted through three nights; but when assured of Sir Robert's course, the Protectionist party, aware the ministry was safe, took the same side, and Mr Hume withdrew his resolutions, which, however just in the abstract, were politically ill-timed. The motives by which Sir Robert was on this occasion actuated are strong and obvious. To have given the Protectionists an opportunity of dis-

placing the ministry whilst the free-trade measures were still only in prospect, would have been to undo all that was done. But he also, beyond a doubt, dreaded at that moment the slightest chance of collision with Russia, seeing our monetary difficulties increasing every hour, and France alienated by the Syrian war against Mehemet Ali and the opposition made to the Spanish marriages by Great Britain.

The year 1848 was ushered in by an event not altogether unlooked for by some, though unexpected by most men,—a third revolution in France, and the proclamation of a republic. To those who seek beneath the surface of ordinary political occurrences for the causes of great national mutations or convulsions, this catastrophe was by no means a surprise, sudden as it was. It has already been noticed in an earlier chapter of this work, that on the final overthrow of the Emperor Napoleon, France was punished by the infliction of a large tribute and the consequent creation of a considerable public debt. This, at the moment, was deemed to be a stroke of deep policy; being held to be a sure means of crippling the military power of France, whilst at the same time it tied a large class of persons (rentiers) to the restored government of the Bourbons. This reasoning was perfectly sound as far as it went; but it did not go far enough. Public debts cut two ways. They attach to a government those who receive interest out of the taxes; but they also render a government unpopular by the additional imposts they necessitate; and as their tendency is to go on increasing, this

source of discontent gets deeper and deeper. This mode of punishing France by putting her in debt was really injurious to the Bourbons, as it made the state expenditure heavier than even under Napoleon. During the reigns of Louis XVIII. and Charles X., the difference was not great; but under Louis Philippe it was nearly doubled.* Louis XVIII. ruled through his ministers and the chambers. Louis Philippe chose to be his own minister in great part; and to make head against the unpopularity thus created, he carried bribery to an extent that would have astounded even Sir Robert Walpole himself. As no French government has ever yet adopted the safeguard of a poor-law, the destitution caused by the augmented taxes filled Paris with discontented and desperate characters; and in 1848, owing chiefly to an arbitrary attempt to stop a proposed reform banquet, an explosion took place which ended in the expulsion of the Orleans dynasty, the proclamation of a republic, and the election of a provisional government and a national assembly.

On this occasion the British ministry again acted a discreet and prudent part. In all such cases, discretion is really and truly "the better part of valour." Lord John Russell's government lost no time, accordingly, in courteously acknowledging the provisional government, and, in due time, the national assembly of France.

	Francs.
* In 1813, the French national expenditure was	975,453,797
In 1829, " " "	1,014,914,432
In 1847, " " "	1,664,372,390

Upon the wisdom of this step no one ventured to cast a doubt; as, in fact, all saw that, with a failing revenue and commerce and manufactures in a state of stagnation, the ministers had troubles enough at home with which to contend. A good deal of misplaced alarm was felt, or affected to be felt, in consequence of a renewed agitation and "monster petition," as it was called, for "the five points" of the people's charter. In those who were ignorant of the character of the British people, such alarm might, after what had happened in France, Italy, and Germany, be excusable enough; but that the metropolis should be placed in a state of siege, as it were, on the occasion of this petition being carried to the House of Commons, was a proceeding, as the event proved, ridiculously needless.

Out of the deep stagnation and collapse, however, which, after the crisis of October 1847, began again to afflict the commercial and manufacturing classes, demands were now to arise less easy to deal with than were those of the advocates of universal suffrage and short parliaments. As soon as the fate of the corn-law was decided, it began to be obvious to reflecting persons that all other laws of a protective character, and all differential duties, must in no long time follow; and, amongst the rest, the repeal of the navigation-laws was confidently anticipated to be at hand. To a nation, the existence of which may be said to depend on its naval supremacy, this was no light question; and, for good or for evil, it was now to be solved. From the time of their enactment, two centuries and a half before, up to this time, no

one had breathed a word of objection to these laws. On the contrary, they had been the subject of high eulogium. They were quoted amongst other instances of the profound sagacity and determination of purpose of the extraordinary man under whose auspices they were enacted: that man being the Protector Cromwell; and to their efficacy the supremacy of Great Britain on the ocean was mainly attributed by orators and by writers of all parties. This universal *prestige* in favour of the navigation-laws, political economists now discovered was a superstition to be exploded, not a reverence to be cultivated. If agriculture needs no protection, it was said, why should shipping? And if the raw produce of all nations is to have free entrance, it was asked, how long can you continue to dictate as to the mode or the persons, in which or by whom it is to be carried? In this latter query the whole pith of the argument doubtless lay, with whatever scientific verbiage it might be garnished.

The truth is that, during the interval since this code was enacted, the national circumstances have entirely changed. Up to the time of the Protectorate, the imports into England had consisted of the luxuries; her exports of the necessaries of life. She still continued a great grazing country, with a population very moderate in numbers, but rich and addicted to luxurious as well as solid living. A nation which sends necessaries in exchange for luxuries may easily dictate conditions of transit. Her exports were absolutely requisite for those who took them. Their luxuries she could, at will, dispense with; and no adage is more true than

that of the Dutch huckster, which proclaims that, "between *will you sell*, and *will you buy*, there is *twenty per cent.!*" For the wines of France, Italy, and Spain; the lace and tapestries of Flanders; the fine cloths of Saxony; the glass, and Eastern spices, and silks of Venice; and the furs of Norway, England had long exchanged her coarse woollens, her leathern manufactures, her hardware, her tin, her copper, her lead, her steel, her iron, and her coal, in every variety of form which they could then be made to assume. This position was now changed. Wool in Great Britain is produced to an extent much less than in former times; and the consequence is, that a large import of foreign wool becomes wanting to supply the demand which the system of weaving by machinery has created. The introduction of the cotton-trade has rendered a huge supply of raw cotton necessary to the existence of a large portion of our population, which, as it has become poor, has also become redundant. In addition to this, the reduced production of tallow in Great Britain has rendered a large importation of foreign tallow and oils requisite; and, instead of a bounty to stimulate an export of surplus grain, an annual importation of foreign corn seems now unavoidable, if the wants of the population are to be met. Under such circumstances, a continued dictation as to terms of transit was felt to be impossible; and on the 15th of May 1848, Mr Labouchere moved in the House of Commons, in a committee of the whole House, a series of changes, the effect of which was a repeal of the chief provisions of the old law, as

to foreign trade. This measure, however its necessity might be anticipated, was powerfully opposed. The navigation-law, as it stood a century before, had been already much infringed upon. In every treaty with any other country, upon the principle of "reciprocity," it had been relaxed in favour of the reciprocating country; and these treaties were not a few. It was, accordingly, an argument with the advocates of an entire repeal, and one which Sir Robert Peel used with great force, to ask, "*how much* British tonnage had declined since the first reciprocity treaty had been ratified?"

To the opponents of these measures, however, this mode of dealing with the question was not, by any means, satisfactory. If since that date British tonnage employed in foreign trade had increased *six per cent.*, and the tonnage of some foreign nation had increased at the rate of *twelve per cent.*, it would be difficult to show that the last would not in time beat the first, unless the celebrated paradox of "the hare and the tortoise" be resorted to. Hence, after all, to show an increase in British tonnage was not identical with showing that "the power of the seas," so long possessed, and so beautifully styled by Lord Bacon "the abridgment of a monarchy," was not imperilled, though the danger might be distant. The result of these controversies was, that a decided public feeling of distrust was engendered very widely; and the opposition to Mr Labouchere's proposal, was exceedingly energetic, especially at the sea-ports. In the House of Commons, the resistance was less strenuous, Sir Robert

Peel aiding the ministry with one of the most powerful and artfully argumentative speeches he ever delivered.

Of this astutely composed address no sketch can convey any idea to the readers. To be appreciated, it must be perused as a whole. Suffice it to say, that Sir Robert Peel laid the greatest stress upon the necessity of nursing the foreign trade of the country, and upon the innovations upon the ancient navigation code, which every treaty of reciprocity had already made. With the United States, he argued, we had a treaty of this kind, and under its operation, whilst the remnant of the navigation-laws lasted, goods from our fellow-subjects in Canada came at a disadvantage compared with those from the United States. Could so preposterous a state of things, Sir Robert asked, be expected to be continued? The right honourable baronet also laid great stress on the comparative expense of ship-building in America and in England. The result, he asserted, was in favour of England. Even in timber the advantage on the American side was, he said, less than was commonly assumed; whilst for sail-cloth, iron, copper, and cordage, they came to England. Their wages, too, were higher than seamen's wages here. Sir Robert confidently affirmed that he should oppose ministers if he could think British naval power endangered; but when he looked at the vast growth of British tonnage since 1814, all such fear vanished from his mind. This speech, which met with many interruptions from the Protectionist benches, concluded the debate, with the exception of

a short address on the same side from Lord John Russell. The result was, that the ministerial proposition was carried by a majority of 117; the ayes being 294, the noes 177. Out of doors, however, the resistance to the measure went on with renewed energy; and the House of Lords, equally hostile to Sir Robert and the ministers whom he really supported, took heart on perceiving this, and exhibited so many symptoms of throwing out the ministerial bill, that it was deemed prudent to postpone it. The Jewish disabilities removal bill, which Sir Robert also strongly supported, and which went up to the House of Peers, met with this fate, by no means to the regret of the majority of the nation, and was negatived by a majority of 35; thus, once more, excluding from the legislature a race of men who, if they believe what they profess, must hold themselves to be alien by divine decree, and to have no conceivable motive for preferring one country to another, except that of rendering those amongst whom they sojourn subservient to the great end of their lives—the amassing of money.

The year 1848 was signalized by another of these rebuffs, also, which foreign nations seem to make a point of inflicting, whenever they see Great Britain struggling with financial difficulty and monetary pressure. The insult, on this occasion, came from Spain; and was more imbittered by the reflection, that it was not unmerited. The influence of this country at the court of Madrid had, by the intrigues and money of the now ex-king Louis Philippe, and the success of his instrument, General Narvaez, been extinguished,

and the sway of the profligate queen-mother been rendered, as far as such government can really exist in Spain, absolute. As soon, however, as the flight of Louis Philippe from France shook the dependence of Spain on France, Lord Palmerston, with that talent for meddling and mischievous intrigue by means of which he has so often embroiled his government with foreign courts, resolved to try to get up a British party in Spain. To do this, it was necessary to rouse and flatter the revolutionary portion of the population; and with this view, he sent to the British envoy, Sir Henry Bulwer, a despatch, in which he instructs Sir Henry to press upon the young queen, Isabella, the good policy of endearing herself to her people, by allowing them to taste the sweets of a liberal government, through the medium of an assembly copied from the English House of Commons!

The good taste of thrusting such advice as this upon a court which never asked it, nor wished to have it, was questionable enough; but to make the matter worse, the envoy not only published the substance of the despatch in the Madrid journals, but also brusquely put the document itself into the hands of the Spanish minister, Sotomayor, instead of a more courtly version, worded so as to be more palatable to Spanish dignity and Spanish pride. The result of this unwise proceeding was easily conceivable. The Duke de Sotomayor returned to the unlucky envoy an answer more distinguished for bitter truth than "candied courtesy;" and this was followed by an order to Sir Henry to quit Spain without delay. This humiliation seemed

to take the cabinet by surprise; and in their first confusion, they exhibited some very unmistakable symptoms of a desire to throw their ambassador overboard, and lay all the blame upon his want of tact. This mode of procedure, Sir Robert Peel, much to his honour, resisted. In the House of Commons he urged ministers to identify themselves with their envoy; and to suffer diplomatic relations to be superseded, without resorting, however, to any further hostile act; this being the most "dignified" way in which a "great" country like Great Britain could treat the petulance of a nation like the Spaniards; and in this convenient way of meeting the matter, ministers and the Houses acquiesced.

Strange to relate, this curious interlude was made still more curious by a repetition in another quarter. Not content with the result of his Spanish interference, Lord Palmerston, within a few months after this, and as if the demon of intrigue deprived him of all foresight of the sure effect of such intermeddling, addressed a letter to the Austrian cabinet. The answer of the Austrian minister was, if possible, more contemptuously cutting than was the rejoinder of Sotomayor; but, as the Austrian government stopt short of expelling our ambassador from Vienna, the affair never had that publicity which made the Spanish quarrel so peculiarly unfortunate.*

* The reply of Prince Schwartzenburg on this occasion thus concludes:—

"The world is agitated by a spirit of general subversion. Eng-

From and after the close of the year 1848, it was observed that Sir Robert Peel relaxed his endeavours to support the ministers, and became more and more the mere spectator of their proceedings. For this change of conduct there were many reasons, more or less obvious. In 1849 the British ports were finally, and probably for ever (were such a phrase applicable to human affairs), opened to the admission of foreign grain and cattle, free of any except a nominal duty. The free trading tariff was now law; and Sir Robert, no doubt, saw that, be its effects what they might on landed rentals and the power of the landed aristocracy, retreat was impossible, and that no ministry would dare to take power with an avowed or known intention to tax the food of the people. It was true that Lord Stanley, Mr D'Israeli, and the other leaders

land herself is not exempt from the influence of this spirit; witness Canada, the island of Cephalonia, and, finally, unhappy Ireland. But, wherever revolt breaks out within the vast limits of the British empire, the English government always knows how to maintain the authority of the law, were [illegible] t the price of torrents of blood.

"It is not for us to blame me.. Whatever may, moreover, be the opinion we form as to the causes of these insurrectionary movements, as well as the measures of repression employed by the British government in order to stifle them, we consider it our duty to abstain from the expression of that opinion, persuaded, as we are, that persons are apt to fall into gross errors in making themselves judges of the so often complicated position of foreign countries.

"By this line of conduct we consider that we have acquired the right to expect that Lord Palmerston will practise with respect to us a perfect reciprocity. You will read this letter to his Lordship, and give him a copy of the same."

Austrian Reply to Lord Palmerston's Letter, August 28, 1849.

of the old Conservative party continued to use language indicating such intention if the opportunity were given; but the sagacious mind of Peel, never deceived in its estimate of public opinion and the force of circumstances, felt that this tone was *vox et preterea nihil:* a tone merely taken to cement the union and keep up the spirit of a party, but impossible to be realized in act. In fact the revolutionary state of Europe rendered it, at this time, highly dangerous to do anything tending to alienate any great portion of the middle classes; and that this was felt by all parties soon became evident in the conduct of all. It was now the policy of the late Premier to leave his Whig successors to shift a little for themselves. As long as there appeared a possibility of a reversal of the free-trade measures, Sir Robert gave a powerful and ready support to the ministry. That chance having passed away, it was his interest now, as the nurse cries "all alone" to the child she wants to walk, to suffer the Whigs to attempt to stand upon their own legs, and get along in virtue of their own resources. In short it became his game to let them feel that they could not do without him, and that amalgamation or extinction was becoming the alternative.

The year 1849 came in with no pleasing auspices. The revenue was failing; manufactures and commerce were in a state of depression; the price of grain was falling from week to week; and the population were distressed and uneasy. Irish agitation had indeed been almost shamed out of existence by the failure of

the ridiculous attempt at insurrection ventured by that weak and vain but probably sincere man, Mr William Smith O'Brien, but the social state of that unfortunate country was dreadful. The religious divisions which had for centuries divided Irish society into two parties, the Orange and Papist, violently hostile to each other, had prevented the existence in Ireland of that which in Great Britain is called "public opinion." The consequence of this was, that the holders of the estates, constituting the Orange party, were too strong to be checked either by the British government or by any public censure. They, for the most part, led lives of unrestrained riot and extravagance; frequently when in debt set the law at defiance; and, as their wants grew, racked their unfortunate tenants to an extent unknown elsewhere. The result of these ages of misrule was, that the potato-blight of 1846–7–8 caused to disappear by hunger, disease, or exile, a million and a half of persons; and that, by the repeal of the corn-laws and admission of foreign grain, the encumbered Irish landlords were irremediably ruined.

The session of 1849 was remarkable chiefly for the neutrality of Sir Robert Peel, and for the state of debility into which the ministry, in whom no man reposed confidence, consequently fell. They were in a minority in the House of Lords; and in the Commons, unless aided by the adherents of Sir Robert Peel, could barely maintain their ground: and it soon appeared that the Conservative party, now the strongest of any of the sections into which politicians were now subdivided, had

almost felt themselves strong enough to destroy the ministry and again come into power. The ministers had again brought forward a measure, the effect of which was to repeal a large portion of the old navigation-law. This proposal was again opposed with great strength in both Houses, and also by a somewhat strong party out of doors. After smart debates, the bill, however, was passed by the Commons, Sir James Graham and Sir Robert Peel's friends all voting for it, and urging the impossibility of retaining the restrictive code of Cromwell and the second Charles.

In the Lords, however, a different and very singular scene was enacted. On the introduction of the bill, the hostile feelings of a large portion of the Peers became manifest; and on the second reading of the bill being moved by the Marquis of Lansdowne, the opponents of the measure mustered in great force, including amongst them Lord Brougham, who, smarting under the neglect of his quondam liberal friends, now discovered, to the astonishment of some and the amusement of many, that this measure had no connexion with the free-trading measures before adopted, but was altogether dangerous and impolitic. The second reading consequently was carried only by a narrow majority of ten; and it was clearly apparent that, if the Conservative party could convince themselves that they were strong enough to resist the united opposition of Sir Robert Peel's and Lord John Russell's friends, their design was to throw out the bill and the ministry together. A calmer consideration, however, convinced them that this was beyond

their powers; and, upon this, a scene ensued not very dissimilar to that of May 1832 when the Reform-bill passed. When the third reading was moved, a long and desultory debate took place, during which the opponents of the bill denounced it in no gentle terms; but, before the division, a large portion of the hostile Peers left the House, and the measure was carried, virtually, by the minority.

The measure next to the Navigation Act in importance was the Irish Encumbered Estates Act; as to the necessity of which few thinking men demurred or hesitated; but which was one of the most extraordinary measures ever adopted by a British legislature. There does not seem to be any great room for doubt that this bold measure had its origin in the practical mind of Sir Robert Peel. No man had a more accurate knowledge than he had of the actual condition of Irish society, and of the results of the rule to which that country had been for centuries subjected. In short, he was aware that it was a ruined country; and that, with the exception of some of the large estates held by rich English nobles or commoners, the upper as well as the lower classes were steeped in all the difficulties that poverty can create. He saw that such a case as this required no common cure: for when all classes are in a state of insolvency, they cannot either rescue themselves or others from the gulf into which their own improvidence or misfortune has plunged them. Accordingly, on the Rate in Aid Bill, one of the measures for meeting the exigencies of Irish distress, being brought in, Sir Robert entered, at great

length, upon the condition of Ireland, the state of which he truly described to be far beyond the reach of vulgar nostrums. In many districts the poor-law—a boon given two centuries too late—was only adding to their ruin, and driving, he said, the few cultivators who had capital out of the country. In fact, panic was doing more than all the emigration schemes that ever were hatched could effect; and large tracts of country were become desolate, uninhabited, deserts.

In such a state of affairs, Sir Robert argued, it was absolutely necessary to rescue the land from its bankrupt nominal owners, and to put it into hands who had means and skill to deal with it. To trust to a root like the potato for national sustenance, he described as being suicidal,—worse than insane. To cereal crops and to grazing, Ireland, he argued, must return even for common safety. Nay he went so far as to affirm that a fine crop of potatoes would now be an evil, as giving renewed confidence in a root on which no nation ought to subsist, and on which none could subsist without subsequent but certain wretchedness. In fine, Sir Robert proposed a commission, who should supersede the Lord Chancellor, and have a power beyond the law; and who should take possession of mortgaged estates, sell them, pay off the mortgages, and have powers to give a parliamentary title to the buyers, above all challenge and not questionable in any court. No proposal, at all resembling this, had been heard in an English House of Commons since the days, at least, of the Long Parliament; yet with so much force was it urged, that little doubt can re-

main that it was really a means to prepare the public mind for the "Encumbered Estates Bill for Ireland," which afterwards followed, and which can only find a parallel in some of the "stop-laws" which the fluctuations of the paper currency compelled some of the states of the American federation to pass. So strong, however, was the persuasion of the absolute necessity of a measure such as that shadowed forth in the powerful address of the ex-premier, that the Encumbered Estates Act was actually passed by the Commons House without a division, and was agreed to by the Lords after a few alterations of no great moment by a select committee of Peers.

From and after the session of 1849, it was distinctly seen, by all who had eyes to see political bearings in their true light, that the existence of the Whigs, as a party, must in no long time depend upon their agreeing to some common ground for rejunction with Sir Robert Peel and his friends. By the people at large, their welfare or the contrary was now regarded with almost total apathy and indifference. What they had lost their opponent had gained; and, by a not unnatural reaction, Sir Robert Peel was now becoming regarded by numbers, who before disliked and distrusted him, as the only man likely, at last, to rescue the nation, if ever it was to be rescued, from its perpetually recurring difficulties. Dealing less in professions, he actually came to be believed to be at heart more liberal than the majority of those who delighted in the name of "Liberals;"—and most men, at the bottom, believed that in serving under Sir Robert the

party would have nothing really to sacrifice, excepting some false pride and a false character, now worn out and of no value even to the owners.

The year 1850 was, however, to bring to a close these fond and vain anticipations. It began singularly; for the country was now again destined to experience one of those "felices reparationes temporum," to use the Roman expression, which became a proverbial phrase during the term of the later emperors, and which had fallen to the lot of England about once in every lustrum from and after 1819. The United States had, without much ceremony, taken possession of the western coast of North America, including the wide regions known as California, Oregon, &c., up to the forty-ninth parallel of latitude, including the great river Columbia, and the celebrated Bay of St Francisco, one of the finest, if not the finest, harbours in the world. At St Francisco a city was already rising; and that love of change which characterizes the North American Anglo-Saxon was causing a population to flock thither, when a rumour arose in 1849, that rich alluvial deposits of gold had been discovered near St Francisco, which bid fair to bring back the times of the opening of the mines of Mexico and Peru. That this was, in part, true the shipment of sundry lumps of the precious metal soon proved; and California and its gold attracted the attention of all Europe as well as America. As this gold began to find its way to the Bank of England, it emboldened the directors to extend a little the margin of their circulation; and some alleviation of the collapse of

1847 was beginning to be felt, even in 1850. It was, however, too faint, as yet, to cure the deep unpopularity into which Lord John Russell and his government had fallen; and the session of 1850 consisted of little else than attacks made upon the ministers, which were repelled by them with difficulty. It was out of their power to pass any measure without the concurrence of Sir Robert Peel, who was virtually minister, and was universally expected to be so, really, in the course of not many months. The time was now at hand, however, for showing the futility of human calculations, and how trifling a casualty may affect the destinies of empires.

Amongst the interferences with foreign countries, for which Lord Palmerston had acquired an unenviable notoriety, there occurred, about this time, a dispute with the Greek government. As a cause of national embroilment, the whole affair was ridiculous. It arose entirely out of some trumpery and probably unfounded claims, made by Lord Palmerston upon the Government of King Otho, on the part of a few who had, or pretended to have, some right to British protection. The allegation was, that the few had been unjustly deprived of some property by the Greek government; and the claim was for compensation. The sum in question was paltry, but the parties were obstinate; the few relying upon British protection, the Greeks upon the good offices of Russia and France. An ordinary reasoner, placed as the British minister was, would have been glad of the offered mediation of France. Not so, however, Lord Palmerston. He would

settle the matter in his own way; and to lengths so absurd was this ridiculous quarrel carried that the French ambassador, M. Drouyn de Lhuys, left London, and the Russian ambassador also absented himself from court. The result was, as it was sure to be, that the British cabinet were glad to let the affair take the course originally proposed by France; to the apparent disappointment of the French National Assembly, who received the news of their ambassador's sudden departure from London with undisguised exultation.

Indignant at the mixed folly and humiliation of this debasing transaction, Lord Stanley moved in the House of Peers a resolution condemnatory of the policy of ministers, which was carried by a majority of thirty-five. This vote, unless the Commons supported ministers by a contrary resolution, involved resignation; and Mr Roebuck accordingly moved a resolution in the House of Commons approving of the foreign policy of ministers. Upon this motion Sir Robert Peel made his last speech in the House of Commons, giving the reasons why he could not vote for a motion so sweeping. This address was worded with that art so habitual to him; and, throughout, it sustained a tone of candour and calm sincerity that must have made a deep impression upon the audience. Sir Robert did not wish Mr Roebuck's motion to be lost; he knew in fact that it would be carried; but he could not support it. Sir Robert Peel had never, in any one instance, sanctioned that insidious and indefensible line of policy, commenced by Mr Canning, when he felt the legitimate influence of his country

wane as her frequently recurring monetary and financial embarrassments became notorious to the world;—a policy perpetually employed by Lord Palmerston, from the hour that installed him in the office of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Against this policy Sir Robert had ever protested; and as Mr Roebuck explained his own meaning, his motion involved the sanction of this policy. It meant, he said, that Great Britain was disposed to view favourably efforts made by any nation to better its institutions,—a phrase that sounds plausibly, but which, in practice, amounts to a tacit league, on the part of Great Britain, with the discontented of every country. The last effort of Sir Robert Peel was to demonstrate to the House the peril and the folly of a pretension to interfere between existing governments and the parties who might be opposed to them. This he did with great happiness and force; and when the last accents of his voice were drowned amidst the cheers of the House of Commons, little did that audience think that they had heard that voice, upon which they had so often hung, for the last time. The fiat however had gone forth.

On Saturday the 29th June, the day after the delivery of this speech, Sir Robert left home on horseback about five o'clock to take an airing, as was usual with him. It appears that he rode first to Buckingham Palace, and entered his name in the book in which were inscribed the names of her Majesty's visitors. He then proceeded up Constitution Hill, when, after exchanging salutes with some one whom

he met, his horse was observed to become restless, and then unmanageable. It was also remarked that Sir Robert sat very unsteadily, and seemed likely to lose his stirrups, when, suddenly curbing the horse, the spirited animal turned short round, plunged, and threw her rider with great force. It has been stated, on what authority is dubious, that Sir Robert had, on that day, at a meeting relative to the great Industrial Exhibition, at which were present Prince Albert and other distinguished persons, been remarked to be less clear and ready than was customary with him; and hence it has been surmised that a sudden attack of vertigo, or congestion on the brain, might be the real cause of the accident.* There was little, however, in the subsequent symptoms to bear out this supposition; and there was nothing in the circumstances of the casualty to require absolutely such a solution.

Sir Robert had fallen upon his face, but he was speedily raised and placed in a sitting position by two gentlemen who were on the spot. On being asked if

* The following extract from a short treatise "On the Treatment of Deafness," by W. Wright, Esq., may possibly throw some light on the case:—

"The late Sir Robert Peel was deaf for twenty years on the left side, attended with noises in the head so excessive that (as he told me) he was frequently awakened by them, and his rest destroyed for the remainder of the night. This he attributed to excess in shooting with percussion-caps. He had also pain round the suture of the temporal bone. I had the pleasure of removing the pain, freeing him very materially from the noise and deafness, by the use of cotton-wool, which I had prepared for him in a thin, simple cerate, placed in the left ear."

he were seriously hurt, the sufferer, who was evidently stunned by the fall, and who groaned heavily, faintly replied, at length, "Very much," and relapsed, after a few minutes, into an insensible state. A carriage was at once procured, and Sir Robert having, with some difficulty, been lifted into it, was driven slowly to his residence in Whitehall Gardens, a messenger going before to acquaint his lady and family with the accident. During the greater part of the way home he was insensible; but on arriving at his own house, and being lifted out of the carriage, he revived a little, and, making an effort, walked with assistance to his dining-room, when he again appeared to be overcome by the grief and agitation of Lady Peel and the rest of his family, and on being placed on a sofa, relapsed into a fainting state. He had been accompanied home by Dr Foucart and Sir James Clarke, who were near the spot when he fell; and Sir Benjamin Brodie, Mr Jackson his family surgeon, and others of the faculty, having been summoned, Sir Robert was, under their direction, placed upon a hydraulic bed, which had been procured for him. From this bed he never rose. He had been through life exceedingly sensible to pain; and, like most persons who are exquisitely sensitive, he feared it. This sensibility now increased to a distressing pitch; and such were his sufferings, that he could scarcely bear the requisite examination, or submit to be bandaged for a fracture of the collar-bone, which formed a part of the injuries received. The rumour of the accident was, in an incredibly short space of time, spread over

the metropolis; and to quiet the public mind, it was deemed proper to issue the following bulletin without more delay:—

"*Whitehall Gardens, June* 29, 7 P.M.

"Sir Robert Peel has met with a severe accident by falling from his horse. There is severe injury of one shoulder, with a fracture of the left collar-bone. There is great reason to hope there is no internal injury."

As soon as this unfortunate accident was known, the public solicitude as to the event became very great. The calls and inquiries of Sir Robert's personal and political friends were of course numerous; but this solicitude appeared to be fully shared by the public, and Whitehall Gardens were thronged until a late hour of the night by groups of persons anxious to catch the slightest information as to the state of the sufferer, and the course the symptoms were taking.

Throughout Sunday, June the 30th, it was found necessary to issue several bulletins. They were not of a satisfactory character. Sir Robert had passed an indifferent night. At noon the symptoms were nearly the same; and in the evening, all that could be said was, that nothing had occurred further "to cause immediate alarm." The negative and dubious nature of these missives was observed to add greatly to the public agitation and anxiety. To Sir Robert Peel men were looking to rescue them from a government that at best seemed only to be semi-animate, and now a gloomy presentiment took possession of the public mind that such hopes were vain; that an inscrutable Providence had ordered it otherwise, and that this

unlooked-for accident was to have a fatal termination. Such was the general feeling throughout Sunday.

On Monday morning a bulletin, which announced that the patient had passed "a good night, and was on the whole better," gave a gleam of hope that all might yet be well. As it began to be known, however, that constant medical consultations were holding, and that the sufferer could not bear the bandages necessary to keep in its place the fractured collar-bone, misgiving again took possession of the public mind, which was aggravated by the publication of a bulletin in the evening, couched in terms that left no doubt as to the now critical state of Sir Robert Peel.

"*July* 1, 1850, 10 o'clock P.M.

"Since seven o'clock, Sir Robert Peel has been very restless, and his condition is less satisfactory than it was in the early part of the day."

As the night wore on, the appearances indicated that the patient's situation was becoming more and more precarious. He refused all nourishment, and his restlessness went on increasing towards midnight. Feeling himself sinking, Sir Robert had directed that his friend Lord Hardinge, with whom he was on terms of great and confidential intimacy, should be sent for. His Lordship lost no time in obeying the summons, and staid by his friend's bed until morning, when, exhausted by suffering, Sir Robert fell into a deep sleep. After this sleep, nature, as is usual in such cases, slightly rallied; and it was announced, that although he had passed a restless night, he had at

length obtained some refreshing slumber, which had alleviated the more serious and alarming symptoms. In this state of comparative composure, the sufferer remained throughout the morning of Tuesday; but this appearance of relief was altogether delusive. A bulletin, published at half-past one, stated that Sir Robert was suffering less pain, and continued much as he was in the morning; but under these better appearances life and strength were seen by the medical attendants to be ebbing, so that at six o'clock they were compelled to say—

"Sir Robert Peel is much exhausted, and altogether not so well as he was in the early part of the day.

July 2, 1850, half-past 6 P.M."

After this announcement, if any hope remained anywhere, it was at an end; and no persons, unless specially sent for, were admitted within the gates. Amongst the few who entered was the Bishop of Gibraltar, who was sent for at the dying statesman's request, together with Mr Dawson, Sir James Graham, Viscount Hardinge, and one or two other relatives and intimate friends. Up to a late hour on Tuesday, Sir Robert retained his senses, and recognised those about him; but occasional wanderings intervened, and increased as the day declined. At ten o'clock the last bulletin informed the crowds round the mansion, that "Sir Robert Peel had been getting rapidly worse since seven o'clock:" a message the sad purport of which was fully understood; and in the morning it became known that the dying statesman, after partaking of the sacrament according to the usage of the Church of Eng-

land, and calmly taking leave of his family and the friends around him, expired at nine minutes after eleven, on the 2d of July 1850.

The precise proximate cause of the death of Sir Robert Peel will remain for ever unknown. His acute sensibility and his impatience under pain prevented any sufficient examination of the injuries received in consequence of his fall being made. It was apparent to the eye that the collar-bone was broken; and the fracture, from the patient's being absolutely unable to endure the torture of manipulation and bandaging, was never completely reduced. After death, however, it was found that the fifth rib on the left side had also been fractured and driven in towards the lungs, and that another rib was severely injured. The probability seems to be, that the immediate cause of death was the internal injury caused by the pressure of the broken rib upon the lungs. As, however, the feelings of the family would not permit a *post mortem* examination, this must remain matter of conjecture.

The private character of this extraordinary man is easily summed up. It is so because it was unsophisticated and exemplary, nay, almost without error. He disdained to imitate the vices of the great among whom his lot was cast, and he had all the private virtues which can alone ennoble those whose greatness depends on the mere accident of position. His nature was not such as to allow him, in the words of Swift, "to herd with lords and gamesters." His tastes were naturally pure and refined. In the intervals of public business,

he generally retired to Drayton Manor, where he found constant and congenial employment in the supervision of the management of his estates, and in the sports and pursuits peculiar to the country, of which he was devotedly fond.

In 1820, Sir Robert married Julia, daughter of General Sir John Floyd, Bart., by whom he had issue, five sons and two daughters: 1. Julia, Viscountess Villiers; 2. Robert, now Sir Robert Peel, M.P. for Tamworth; 3. Frederick, M.P. for Leominster; 4. William, Captain, R.N.; 5. John Floyd, recently in the Scotch Fusiliers; 6. Arthur Wellesley; 7. Eliza. In all the relations of domestic life, Sir Robert Peel was above censure. He was a good husband, a considerate father, and a kind master to all his dependents.

One proof of the innate propriety of his modes of thinking was, that although he had many enemies, and was often coarsely and often virulently assailed by the extreme men both of the conservative and liberal parties, he never in return suffered himself to use harsh language. In fact, though really destitute of any reliance upon the good sense and knowledge of the people, he always spoke of them with courtesy and friendliness, and never, like the more brilliant but insolent Canning, called the advocates of a parliamentary reform "a low-degraded crew," nor stigmatized the people at large as "the basest populace." The only two occasions, perhaps, on which he ever exhibited a loss of his usual temper in the House of Commons was, when Earl Grey's ministry dissolved Parliament in 1831, during the struggle for the reform-bill, and when the erasure of his name

from the roll of privy-councillors was moved by Mr Cobbett: his reply on this last occasion, consisting merely of a tissue of personalities, most effectively and bitterly launched no doubt, but not containing even the semblance of an answer to the terrible bill of indictment offered by the author of the *Political Register*.

When not engrossed by the toils of public business, the tastes and amusements of Sir Robert Peel were those of a man of highly refined and cultivated mind. His library was large and well selected; his classical attainments were not inconsiderable; and, for a man so constantly engrossed by public affairs, his range of reading was great. Art also came in for a large share of his attention. By music he does not seem to have been much affected, which, considering his sensitive temperament, is rather singular; but of pictorial excellence he had a deep sense, and his extensive gallery contains, besides some fine old paintings by the ancient masters, a great number of the choicest specimens of the British school. In fact, with literary men and with artists he evidently had many sympathies in common; and though, unlike some of his political opponents, he wisely eschewed the ambition of shining as an author, it cannot be doubted that, if he had struggled to achieve a literary reputation, he must have succeeded much better than some at least of his rivals. In any private capacity whatsoever, in short, Sir Robert Peel would have been not only an exemplary but an extraordinary man. He was not an original thinker; but his wonderful adaptation to business of every sort, his unmatchable knowledge of char-

acter, his industry, and his unerring caution, must have made him successful in any walk of life.

If, as a politician, his career is much more open to blame, and also to misapprehension, that career only affords another instance how a single false step at the outset may distort and vitiate the entire course of a political life, and, in the poet's words,

> "Do all the noble substance of worth out
> To its own scandal."

It has been said, perhaps not altogether untruly, of Sir Robert Peel, that although he had a party he had no personal following; and that although he had allies, he had no friends. The charge—if it be a charge—is not without foundation; and it is only to be accounted for by reference to the deep and impenetrable reserve which a course, made tortuous by circumstances from which he never escaped, rendered necessary to him. Sir Robert has also been charged with being more prone to conciliate his enemies than serve his partisans, and with giving patronage to men of the Liberal party whilst he neglected his own. When, however, were either litterateurs or artists ever content with the distribution of patronage by anybody? His kindness to poor Haydon may, peradventure, be construed into an extension of patronage to one who, politically speaking, was not a partisan of his patron; but surely this is overbalanced by the interest he took in Mr Allan Cunningham, Dr Maginn, and others of less note and inferior desert attached to the Conservative party. Compared with many of his predecessors, his sympathy with those who adorned

literature and art was exemplary indeed. He certainly would not have suffered Otway and Butler to have perished by hunger or destitution; nor have left Chatterton to the alternative of suicide or starvation; nor have allowed Barry to have pined away amidst neglect and contempt; nor have doomed Burns to end his days a marked and unpromoted country gauger.

That Sir Robert Peel himself felt, and deeply felt, the want of high birth and a noble descent, and was aware how far even talents like his own might be neutralized by the want of aristocratic pretensions, is very evident. He himself always said that the House of Commons was "his element," and that in the Commons' House he should remain; and he kept his word; and by his last will forbade his heir to accept of a peerage, and directed that his own funeral should be that of a private gentleman merely. In this is to be discerned that innate and true dignity of mind which involuntarily recalcitrates against all distinctions, excepting those of talent and virtue; which made him know that the plain denomination of Robert Peel would be more illustrious in the page of history and the eye of posterity, than would have been the Earl of Tamworth or the Duke of Drayton; and which forced him to feel that, dressed in his plain blue frock unblazoned with stars, or orders, or conventional decorations of any sort, he was a more conspicuous personage than the tinselled beings by whom he was surrounded. Sir Robert Peel, in short, gloried in the position of a great English Commoner; and envy herself must own that he had all the domestic virtues which can adorn

and ennoble such a station. To his public character we now turn.

The public characters of British statesmen have generally been the reverse of their private characters; nor is Sir Robert Peel any exception to this rule. In private life his acts were open, liberal, unostentatious, and unambiguous, and therefore unsuspected and unblamed. As a statesman, his political character will be to future historians, as it has been to most of his contemporaries, a puzzle, save and except to those who may be fortunate enough to possess and appreciate the only key to the mystery. To the ordinary observer the course of Sir Robert Peel must ever appear both tortuous and inconsistent; and by every observer it must, at best, be viewed as a policy wanting those requisites which critics maintain every series of dramatic action ought to possess, "a beginning, a middle, and an end." To those who are inclined to approve of it and to those who are inclined to blame it, as a fragment only can it be viewed. Contemplate it as we will, it must ever appear as an arch without a keystone, or as a dramatic series of acts without a catastrophe; in short, as an acted enigma never finished, in which the obscure is never cleared nor the dark illuminated. To those who criticise by the surface merely, this seems easily susceptible of explanation. For what difficulty, it will be asked, is there in conceiving that the course of a man who changes his opinions as the political sky changes, should be inconsistent; or that his course, who steers

by the card of expediency only, should have no fixed port of destination? This reasoning, however plausible, is not however conclusive, because it assumes that which ought to be proved before any conclusion is drawn. Is it true that Sir Robert Peel, as a politician, never either held nor was ever guided by any fixed political principle? Upon the reply to this question must depend the soundness of that logic which from inconsistency in act authoritatively deduces want of stability in principle; forgetful of the fact that, though it be the statesman's profession to direct events, he is much oftener guided by them; and that one error in political judgment may lead to many deviations in political action, to be avoided only by avoiding the parent mistake from which they sprang.

When an inquiry is to be made as to the real character either of Sir Robert Peel or any other statesman of eminence, no weight ought to be given to the public professions of such men. It so seldom happens that statesmen feel it prudent to give the real reasons for their acts, that their ostensible grounds ought never to be taken as evidence; but judgment ought to be founded upon the acts themselves, and the reasons for the acts should be inferred from the circumstances of the time, and from their relations to former measures emanating from the same mind. That Sir Robert Peel, therefore, through life, professed to hold Conservative principles, is no evidence that he did hold them. It is only evidence that he, for reasons of his own, deemed it requisite to continue in the pro-

fession of these principles. Although, however, not to be taken as evidence in an estimate of character, these professions might yet be true. Their truth, nevertheless must be deduced from other sources; and the truth must be sought, not in professions, but in circumstances and acts. All the earlier circumstances of Sir Robert's life tended to instil into him those principles that rank as Conservative. His father was a high Tory, an adherent, almost to the pitch of idolatry, of the younger Pitt, and a stanch friend to his subordinates and successors. In these principles —that is to say, in the principles of Addington, Eldon, Perceval, Liverpool, Bexley, and Castlereagh—Sir Robert was therefore educated; and the completion of that education at Oxford, and the honour paid him by that university, must have strongly tended to fix these principles in his mind.

It is no doubt true that, out of the many and various acts which Sir Robert Peel was, in the course of his eventful life, called upon to perform, more than one may be selected which were condemned by the majority of his party, resisted by them, and carried only by the aid of their opponents. But is this full proof that Sir Robert was inconsistent; or that this majority were right; or that the tenor of two or three acts, without a particular analysis of the circumstances which led to them, is to be taken as decisive, though contradicted by all the rest of his career? In order to determine these questions, it first becomes requisite to determine one more; and that is, whether the Conservative, or rather Tory prin-

ciple, admits the propriety of being governed sometimes by inevitable circumstances and the force of events, or not? If this is denied without reservation or exception, then it certainly follows that in this sense Sir Robert Peel was probably never a Tory. But if Toryism be defined to be merely a general resistance to change, and a preference to government by a few persons, as the least liable to change, such definition includes Sir Robert Peel, without excluding his high Tory colleagues, Perceval, Eldon, and Liverpool, who all admitted the necessity of the change of dynasty in 1688, although it was not admitted by the Tories of that era.

If the general tenor of Sir Robert Peel's actions be considered, it proves him to be Conservative in feeling and conduct, as far as acts can vindicate feelings. It cannot be denied, by either friend or enemy, that, from first to last, Sir Robert Peel never evinced the slightest idea of the possibility or utility of popular government in any usual sense of those words. He was indeed an advocate for "a House of Commons," so called; but his idea of such a house was, that to be safe the majority of its members must be under the influence of a few families of rank and wealth; Sir Robert consenting to admit a few representatives chosen by wide constituencies merely to afford a plea for saying that the masses were not unrepresented, whilst in reality that which he called their representation was kept in perpetual abeyance by the majority who were otherwise elected. And upon these feelings he always acted, when free so to act. He defended the conduct of the magistracy of Manchester, in dis-

persing, by force and bloodshed, a meeting which all lawyers now admit to have been legal. He sanctioned all the prosecutions of popular writers that took place during his time, such as that of Messrs Leigh and John Hunt for a libel on George IV., that of Mr Cobbett for remonstrating against the employment of foreign troops in England, and that of Mr Hone for a parody of the Nicene Creed; although no lawyer at the present day would attempt such prosecutions. Further, he defended all those acts which, in 1817, were framed to stifle the demand for a reform of the House of Commons which then became loud. The reform-bills of 1831 he opposed to the very last, and only acquiesced in the reform-act, passed in 1832, when he saw that the changes directly brought about by it would neither be great nor immediate.

In all these and many other passages of his life, such, for instance, as his tacit sanction of the Poor-law Amendment-bill, the tenor of his way was consistent. It was anti-popular in the most rigid sense of the word, and this will be admitted by the most rigid assertor of the Conservative principle; he who so admits retiring upon the objection that all this only proves inconsistency more strongly, unless the entire of his acts can be shown to have been done under similar feelings. But putting the case so, it still remains far from conclusive, unless it be roundly asserted that the principle of Conservatism can in no case bend to circumstances, even when the safety of the country may seem to require such a relaxation of maxims in themselves of an abstract nature. But if this be

asserted, it will be found to follow that this kind of inconsistency has been shared by almost every Tory or Conservative statesman since 1819; the only difference being, that the acts for which Sir Robert Peel is arraigned on a charge of political apostasy, being topics of greater domestic interest, were more prominent, and liable to call forth opinions more severe in that proportion.

In any estimate of character, however, it must be admitted that Sir Robert Peel's peculiar constitution of intellect rendered him, as to certain points, liable to a degree of timidity and want of moral fortitude inimical to his career as a statesman, and especially as a British statesman. His mind was not an expanded one, although as far as it went its faculties were complete and admirable. Hence, in matters of practical administration he always attained his end. His new modelling of the Irish Police, and his plan for the London Police Constabulary force, are living proofs of this. It is useless to say (as certainly might be said) that his own measures tended to make these innovations necessary; and that the formation of a police force is mechanical rather than a work for a great statesman. But that is not the point. The question here simply is, Were the means well adapted or not to secure the desired end? To this there is only one reply to be made. Cromwell's new modelling of the parliament's army was a mechanical thing; yet to that how much of his success was owing!

Sir Robert Peel's knowledge of mankind, and instinctive perception of the means by which, without

knowing it, they might be governed, were in truth probably never exceeded. His judgment, as to the tendency and probable direction of opinion, was also wonderfully fine, and amounted to a high degree of foresight. Hence, of tact, astuteness, and the faculty of never being caught off his guard, nor irritated by an apparently sudden obstacle, he was thoroughly possessed; and hence came his wonderful command of the House of Commons, which was superior to that attributed to Mr Canning, although he did not possess Canning's vivacity and power of dazzling and captivating an audience, not unwilling to be so amused. He had also too large a share of cool judgment to venture upon those flights in which his animated and specious rival sometimes too hastily indulged; as in the famous "Æolus" speech which won for a *soi-disant* Tory minister the *vivats* of all the hot revolutionary spirits of Europe. Hence Sir Robert Peel, in his most apparently impassioned passages, never compromised himself nor his policy; never swerved for a moment from that plausible logic which, in the House of Commons, won him the ear both of the grave and the gay; and never failed so to shape that logic as to make it suit at once the feelings and ratiocination of hearers, the depth of both of which he could sound with all the precision of science and certainty of instinct.

He had, however, self-knowledge enough to be aware that, although his mind was one of much perfection within its range, that range was limited. In short, he felt that, on abstract questions, involving complicated details within a wide expanse of application, his

intellect was inferior to that of many other men. Hence, on questions of this nature, no man was more accessible to the influence of others, whether for good or for evil, than Sir Robert Peel; and hence the sarcasm of D'Israeli, that "his mind was one great appropriation clause," which, on a certain range of questions it was, very unfortunately for both the man and the minister. There are certain determinations and certain actions of so pervading a nature, that when once arrived at or performed, they have power to fix the tendency and colour of an entire career. An error of this kind may disturb and turn aside the whole clear current of an after-life; may distort its views, warp its intentions, and baffle its best resolves; and this was unquestionably the case with Sir Robert Peel.

The wide generalities of political economy, so liable to error, so difficult of analysis, were precisely the problems with which an intellect like that of Sir Robert was not fitted by nature to deal; and, unfortunately for himself, this deficiency put him in early life under the influence of the Economist party in the House, by whose pretensions to profound science he was captivated, by whose peculiar sway in the House of Commons he was dazzled, and by whose deference to himself he was flattered. Without even thoroughly mastering any single department of the science in which they professed to be adepts, he adopted the dogmata of the party, as men do the decision of oracles, upon trust; and whilst ambitious of being the minister of a nation great in resources, but hampered with financial involvements, he un-

wittingly deprived himself of the power of being a free agent, or of acting independently, amidst difficulties which he had helped to create.

In addition to this tendency to distrust of his own decisions, and to be led by the specious logic of others upon abstract questions, especially when clothed in the imposing verbiage of science, there lurked in the mind of Sir Robert Peel another motive, which early led him really to sympathize with such men as Horner, Huskisson, and Ricardo, rather than with the Liverpools, the Sidmouths, the Eldons, the Percevals, the Vansittarts, and the other remains of the latter school of the younger Pitt, amidst whom, originally, the destiny of his youth was cast. Peel, in fact, like his more glittering rival, Canning, felt deeply the want of birth, and that aristocratic *imprimatur* which is the license for men to aspire to influence and office in an aristocratic country. He was ambitious; and he perceived too strongly his own mental superiority over many of those whose behests he was expected to obey—to square his thoughts, resolves, and aspirations, according to any prescribed fashion, dictated by the few leading families whom birth and fortune at that period placed at the head of the Tory party.

Amongst the Economists of the House of Commons, a certain portion of political free-thinking was veiled under the guise of abstract science; and this no doubt, to the young mind of Peel, was a secret attraction, joined to the natural admiration with which he regarded their influence in the House of Commons, obtained, as it was, by the mixture of some clearness

and some knowledge, with a good deal of quackery and a vast deal of pretension. In this rash and altogether premature connexion with the parliamentary economists of the time, and in the embarrassments to which, in after-life, that early connexion perpetually subjected him, we find a key both to his character and his career. His admiration of that which must have appeared to him the unfathomable profound, allured him, no doubt, in contradiction to the paternal lessons, to adopt the theoretical blunders and absurdities of the first bullion committee of 1810; and, in 1819, to evade the remonstrances of his shrewder father, for the perilous guidance of the specious, subtle, vain, and specially arrogant Ricardo. In the tales of the Arabian Nights, we read of one personage who wherever he went was haunted by a mysterious black box, out of which, as soon as night and silence gave permission, came a hideous little old woman, who upbraided the unfortunate wight with his crimes and short-comings till day. How many such nights must have beset Sir Robert Peel after the plunge of 1819? And how often must he have repented neglecting the warning of a too prophetic parent, to be entoiled for life amidst the lime-twigs of a subtle, conceited, and specious stockjobber!

A minute study of the political life of Sir Robert Peel, with a view to this particular subject and its bearings, may convince the most prejudiced that most of the great events of his singular career were shaped and fashioned by it; and that no minister, since 1819, has escaped the influence of the rash legislation of

that ill-omened year. It is sufficiently evident that the weakness entailed upon his government by the reaction caused by the final extinction of the smaller bank-paper in 1829, joined to his dread of a coming explosion at Paris, decided him to try to quiet Ireland by the Emancipation Act of that year. It is equally clear that the same causes led him and his colleague, the Duke of Wellington, to submit to the dictation of Russia as to the blockade of the Turkish coasts during the same year; as well as to acknowledge, without the slightest delay, and as it were in breathless haste, the revolutionary government of Louis Philippe in 1830. To the same root may be traced his adoption of the strange notion of modern British political economists, that everybody must sell without profit for the benefit of everybody; his conviction no doubt being that, without foreign trade, the surplus population of these islands could not be employed: and that, without the admission of grain and cattle and other foreign products freely, that foreign trade must be stopped or transferred to other hands. To the same secret misgivings must be attributed his assent to the repeal of the navigation law, against which, whilst England was independent of foreigners for the necessaries of life, and whilst foreigners were too happy to sell her luxuries on any terms, no man breathed a word. From the same secret feeling of the inability of his monetary system to stand the shock of a great war, and the necessary resistance of the entire moneyed interest to anything which might tend to overset the Peel currency and substitute a depreciated

paper, arose his silent acquiescence in the treaties of Adrianople and of Unkiar Skelessi; his silence when Russia confiscated the Vixen against the law of nations, and when Palmerston refused to divulge the opinion of the law-officers of the crown; and his submission, after the outrageous conduct of the United States as to the Maine boundary dispute and the Canadian revolt, as evinced in that treaty which his critic, Lord Palmerston, contemptuously characterized as "the Ashburton Capitulation."

It must, however, be borne in mind that Sir Robert Peel's consciousness of an inability to deal with complicated questions of an abstract nature, early gave his mind that tendency to wavering, or what has been termed, more truly than elegantly, "squeezableness," which, on two great questions, embroiled him with and in the end severed him from his party; and this tendency received additional force from more than one circumstance of his early parliamentary life. During the latter years of the younger Pitt, the command of money which the bank restriction and issues of inconvertible paper gave him, the continued rise in prices, and the enormous nominal profits upon all government loans, contracts, and purchases, which chained men's minds to his system, made that system in reality, for the time and humanly speaking, omnipotent. Hence to such men as Lord Eldon, Lord Sidmouth, Mr Vansittart, Mr Perceval, and Lord Castlereagh, the system of Pitt appeared a thing in itself unalterable and not to be altered by others, so manifold seemed to them its advantages and so irre-

sistible its influence. Nor is this to be wondered at, all these men being totally ignorant of the phenomena which follow a depreciating paper currency. But in 1809, when Mr Peel first entered the House of Commons, this position of affairs began to show symptoms of change and reaction, and this made men, capable of thinking, think in this particular direction. Mr Horner and the Edinburgh Reviewers admitted that the paper-money was in a course of depreciation; and the fate of the French assignats, then fresh in memory, taught them that such a course could not be continued beyond a certain limit. A freedom of thinking on economics thus arose in the House of Commons; and Mr Canning and Mr Peel, seduced by the influence which the supposed mastery of these *cabalâ* gave the Economists in parliament, first countenanced and then joined them. This was the first blow to the conservatism held by the personal friends of Mr Pitt. But in every other sense it can hardly be denied that Sir Robert Peel was a Conservative. He was certainly not, as some of Mr Pitt's personal admirers and friends appeared to be, a believer either in the omniscience or impeccability of their idol; but he held Mr Pitt's general principles as firmly as they could do.

In point of fact, one of the principal difficulties of Sir Robert Peel's parliamentary career was to explain away the consequences which some of his opponents, and some of the most sagacious and honest of them, attributed to the acts of Pitt, aggravated as these consequences undoubtedly were by the monetary legislative blunders of his successors. In his attempts to do

this, it is not to be broadly inferred that Sir Robert Peel was, as he was often called, altogether insincere. The tendency of his mind was, in matters of this kind, to be deceived by superficial appearances; and all men too easily believe that which they wish.

The symptoms of the decadence of a country are never at the surface; and hence it happens that, in all past experience, the decline of empires has always been disbelieved by a majority of their inhabitants. It is disbelieved for the same reason that made the Londoners laugh at Sir Christopher Wren when, not daring to use gunpowder, he resorted to the ancient battering-ram in order to bring down the rocky ruins of old St Paul's, preparatory to rebuilding the cathedral. It produced so little visible effect that the very workmen got ashamed, and shrunk under the derision of the spectators. But the great architect knew better. He only replied, "Persevere;" and, after a time, down came the wall in mass, a heap of disjointed stones. This was because, without seeming to injure the squared masonry that formed the face of the wall, the heavy strokes of the ram shook and disunited the rubble and cement which held the rest together. And thus it is with society. A social decay does not visibly affect the greater institutions of a country. These individually resist the blows given to the edifice. It is in the obscure and hidden parts of the social building that the disjointing goes on; and when this is complete, the rest follows; for the greater institutions can no more stand without the cement and rubble than could old St Paul's. This invaluable

truth Sir Robert Peel never understood; and hence he rested his defence upon great and specious generalities, such as gross imports and exports, increase of railways, or increase of ships, heedless of the obscurer and more minute dislocations which, had he been inclined to investigate, would everywhere have met his eye. And hence, though perpetually haunted by dread of revolution, he was all the time unaware that his own measures were producing more mutation and more suffering than a revolution could have done; and that they must so continue to do until they themselves fall under some of the changes which, sooner or later, circumstances so extraordinary are sure to produce.

It has been Sir Robert Peel's fortune, as it has been that of all men placed in power, the springs of whose actions lie deep and half-concealed from themselves, to become the subject of unbounded praise and unbounded censure from opposing parties. This is because such men never divulge their real motives, and are therefore misunderstood, for good or for evil, by most of those around them. Both extremes are generally in the wrong: and Sir Robert Peel was in fact less of a free-trader than he is thought to be by Mr Cobden, and a better Conservative than he is deemed by the Duke of Richmond or Lord Stanhope. And thus it is that, to common observation, his career must always appear puzzling; and by historians who narrate events without probing their causes, his administrations must ever be delineated as a tissue of inconsistencies. At the best, however, as they only

constitute a fragment of a series of changes, which have their root in one grand legislative blunder but which are yet incomplete, there must ever remain a mystery about Sir Robert Peel's true character, which it will be difficult for posterity to penetrate. It seems quite certain that his fame can never be that of a great minister: although in his own time he has been styled "great," by those who compared him with the lesser men who were his opponents. When compared with the leaders of the Whig party his superiority is at once manifest: but calm reflection will show that this superiority rested on his possession of two or three highly available but not great qualities, of which his rivals were destitute, or nearly so. His knowledge of mankind, and of the immediate tendency of events, and of the bent of public opinion, was beyond that of all men of his time; and this joined to great administrative talents was the source of his wonderful influence over the House of Commons and the political parties to which he attached himself.

Much has been said of "fascination," as a power possessed by men and some of the inferior animals, to compel others to act in direct contradiction to their natural inclinations and instincts. No man ever possessed this mysterious faculty to an extent greater than that in which it was possessed by Sir Robert Peel, who on more than one occasion prevailed upon great numbers of his party to act in direct opposition to their former avowed opinions and predilections; and thus far will the power of Peel over his fellow-men be acknowledged and appreciated by posterity. But to the majority of

mankind his career must ever remain an enigma. The real springs of his actions he never could disclose; nor did he ever divulge (if he knew them) the ultimate and final results to be expected to follow his policy. That policy has, therefore, ostensibly neither beginning nor end; nor does it possess any features which can make it generally intelligible. To future historical students Sir Robert Peel's character therefore must ever appear to be one of those the extraordinary nature of which all men admit, but upon every other portion of which the clouds of doubt must continue to rest. Like St Thomas à Becket, Cromwell, Machiavelli, the Emperor Julian, Ignatius Loyola, and others, he will be variously estimated as his character is contemplated from various points of view; whilst the true key to his character and career remains hidden from the great majority of those who in future time shall think, or speak, or write concerning him.

APPENDIX.

IN order to bring down the history of Sir Robert Peel's policy to the present period, the author deems it not out of place to append a slight sketch of the careers and characters of that statesman's leading successors, and to place their present political position as impartially as he can before the view of his readers. They may be classed thus: Lord Aberdeen, Sir James Graham, Mr Gladstone, Mr Sidney Herbert, and Mr Cardwell; and he will take them in the order in which he has placed them.

LORD ABERDEEN is the fourth Earl of that name. It is a Scotch title, the date of its creation being just prior to the Revolution of 1688; that is to say, 1682. His Lordship sits in the British House of Peers as Viscount Gordon of Aberdeen—a creation quite recent, being of the date of 1814: a period when the high Tory party, just beginning to be sensible of a growing weakness, sought the help of talent wherever they could find it. George Hamilton Gordon, the present Lord Aberdeen, was born in 1784. His father, Lord Haddo, dying during the life of his grandfather, the third earl, and his grandfather also dying in 1801, he became Earl of Aberdeen whilst yet a minor, being barely seventeen years of age when he succeeded to the title and estates. He, like his celebrated leader, Sir Robert Peel, was educated at Harrow School, and afterwards went to Cambridge, where he took the degree of Master of Arts. At school

as well as at college, he evinced a decided leaning towards classical studies, and, singularly enough, together with the more elegant and accomplished scholar, Tweddell, may be said to have helped to commence that Greek mania, which another and still more brilliant *élève* of Harrow and of Cambridge, Lord Byron, carried to its height, and the *finale* of which has eminently proved the gross mistake of mixing with actual politics an enthusiasm, amiable in a schoolboy, but absurd in a politician. Tweddell, who was a man of fine genius, as well as an exquisite classical scholar, died prematurely in the region upon which the muse of Byron was destined to confer a superfluous addition of fame. Lord Aberdeen having gone over the same ground, shared with Lord Elgin the effects of that ill-temper in which the too sensitive Byron then was with everybody connected with the land of the *Edinburgh Review*. His Lordship figured, strangely enough, in the trenchant satire of "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," as

"The travell'd Thane, Athenian Aberdeen;"

whilst Lord Elgin, for no other offence than that of being a Scotchman, and having rescued from destruction the marbles which bear his name, was afterwards treated to "the curse of Minerva," another ebullition of the splenetic and irritated poet.

Lord Aberdeen began public life, when twenty-two years of age, by being chosen one of the sixteen representative Scottish Peers to whom are allotted seats in the House of Lords. This was in 1806, when the death of the younger Pitt had again given the Whig party a brief taste of that power from which they had been so long driven; for his selection on this occasion was as much indebted to his high Tory principles as to his character for ability. The party were sure of his vote; and with a caution which has been his characteristic through life, he forbore attempting to make any figure as an orator. The House of Peers is, in fact, ill adapted for the parliamentary debut of a man ambitious of distinction. It had even then ceased to

be regarded with that interest with which, as a branch of the legislature, it had formerly been regarded by the public; and the colder and more stately tone of the oratory there prevalent was not suited to a young aspirant, who, in these requisites, was sure to be outdone. Though unable to attract attention, however, by a heavy and formal style of eloquence, Lord Aberdeen's available business-talent became gradually appreciated by his party. In fact, so much confidence was reposed in his caution, that when, after the disasters of the French in 1812, it became advisable to attempt to form that final league before which Napoleon ultimately fell, Lord Aberdeen was selected as the envoy who was secretly to detach Austria from the French Emperor; in which he succeeded. His success in this mission brought him another of similar character. During the struggle which ended in the occupation of Paris by the allies in 1814, it became important to deprive the French ruler of as many of his auxiliary forces as possible. With this view, Lord Aberdeen's cautious cunning was again put into requisition, and he was employed to separate the vain and volatile Murat from the interests of his brother-in-law, and to cause him to act as a checkmate against the viceroy Eugene Beauharnois, who was preparing to attack Austria from the side of Italy. This more difficult task, as it seemed to most, Lord Aberdeen accomplished. By representing to the King of Naples in exaggerated colours the power of the league now formed by the Germanic powers, Russia, and England, by predicting the certain ruin of Napoleon, and offering to guarantee the kingdom of Naples to Murat, its then possessor, provided he would abandon his falling chief, he induced the vain and shallow Murat to abandon the man who gave him his crown, and to declare war against the viceroy of Italy. This heartless act, for such it was, speedily met with condign punishment. Murat, though a vain and shallow, was not a wholly bad-hearted man. In a fit of repentance and mortification, after the return of Napoleon from Elba, he again changed sides, and flung away his crown, and ultimately his

life, in a foolish attempt to recover a position which a double treachery had irretrievably lost him.

The issue of these two lucky negotiations very naturally established the character of Lord Aberdeen as a cautious and sagacious diplomatist. His want of talent as a debater seems to have precluded his being employed by any of the ministers that held power between 1815 and 1828, when the Peel and Wellington administration followed that of Lord Goderich. No man's judgment of available and practical talent ever surpassed that of Sir Robert Peel, and by Peel his value as a subordinate was at once appreciated. He was first, as a preparatory step, made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, but after a few months, placed in the position which Sir Robert had from the first destined him to hold, that of the Foreign Office.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs during the continuance of the Peel and Wellington cabinet in office, Lord Aberdeen followed a strictly conservative policy, as it is now but was not then called. In the dispute as to the succession to the crown of Portugal, he interpreted the resignation of Don Pedro's claim as barring his entire line, whether through the male or female, and of course disallowed the unnatural and disgusting arrangement by which Pedro's brother Miguel was to succeed, upon condition that he contracted an incestuous marriage with his own niece, Donna Maria, Pedro's daughter. He also put a stop to a scheme for enlisting men in this country to seat Donna Maria on the throne by force, and to compel the people of Portugal to accept a liberal constitution, framed under English auspices, and to be employed for English purposes; and whatever might be the case with the British public, who are easily swayed by phrases, it is quite certain that, in this step, Lord Aberdeen had with him the great body both of the Portuguese people and of the priesthood, who were naturally unwilling to see their church property confiscated to pay debts with which neither the church nor the people had anything to do. In the

measures which chiefly gave a character to the sway of Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington at this period, Lord Aberdeen, as a member of the government, of course concurred. These were, the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and the Act for emancipating the Roman-catholics, both of which he actively supported.

In 1830 the government was broken up; and until 1841, when Sir Robert Peel again obtained power, Lord Aberdeen remained in comparative obscurity. His lordship, however, who professed Presbyterian principles of religion, though totally without bigotry of any kind, but, on the contrary, with a tinge of the latitudinarian in his theological views, essayed to heal up the breach which during the Melbourne administration existed between the Free Church and patronage parties of the Scottish Establishment. In this, however, he totally failed; and as always happens to those who attempt to act the moderator in theological polemics, he pleased neither party.

In 1841 Sir Robert Peel was again called to power, strictly by the voice of the people, to whom the Whig party had become thoroughly obnoxious, and Lord Aberdeen once more found himself at the Foreign Office. This post he held until Sir Robert Peel's retirement in 1846. During this period he had to arrange a peace with China, which he did to the entire satisfaction both of those who defended and those who disapproved of that rupture, with a power as moderate as unaggressive in its maxims of international arrangement. He also had to heal up the disputes at that time going on between the British government and that of the United States, a task much less easy. Upon a calm review, both of the question as to the boundary line of the State of Maine, and of the question as to the right of the Oregon territory, most reasoners will admit that justice and usage were, upon the whole, on the side of the claims urged on the part of Great Britain. If the right was with Great Britain, the might was, however, unfortunately with the Americans, who were determined not to succumb;

and Lord Aberdeen, seeing resistance useless, signed that treaty which his rival, Lord Palmerston, has justly designated "the Ashburton Capitulation," and also suffered the entire valuable portion of the Oregon territory to be erected into an American possession, under the confederation of the United States.

After Sir Robert Peel's unfortunate and premature death in 1850, it seemed as if Lord Aberdeen's chances of succeeding again to power were at an end. Fortune however willed it otherwise. After the loss of Sir Robert Peel, who had given them a modified support, it soon became evident that the Whig party had become too weak to form of themselves a ruling power in the state. They persevered in the attempt, and failed; and a similar fortune attended the high Conservative party, who, under Lord Derby, clutched a brief power which they were totally unable to hold. A coalition now seemed to be the only alternative, unless government was to fall into a sort of anarchy; and Lord Aberdeen, as a *dernier ressort*, was placed at the head of a coalition cabinet, destined to little better fortune than its immediate predecessors. The Czar, seeing the weakness of the British government, having Austria nearly in his power, and encouraged by the ill-advised tone which the British press for the most part, and even some influential politicians of high standing, held towards the Emperor Louis Napoleon, now calculated that the juncture for prosecuting his design of securing Turkey in Europe was arrived. Careless of even a colourable pretext for hostilities, and probably delighted by the humiliation he might thus inflict on the allies of the Sultan, he made, through the medium of a special envoy, demands with which he knew the Porte could not comply without consenting to the dismemberment of the empire, and when they were refused, seized Moldavia and Wallachia. This violence at length roused the broken spirit of the Divan; and, despite the efforts of the British and French ambassadors to elude the crisis and prevent the Turks committing themselves and their allies to actual hostilities with Russia, war on the

part of Turkey was declared; an act which, however it might be deprecated by their several governments, met with the enthusiastic approval of the French and British people.

That Lord Aberdeen keenly felt the enormous difficulties of this unexpected situation is very certain. Although the millions did not, he knew the whole of the embarrassments, patent and hidden, which combined to render perilous in the extreme a war with a power like Russia; at the same time he was aware of the impossibility, without deep national and personal disgrace, of abandoning the Sultan to his own resources. Thus beset, Lord Aberdeen, like many other men, wrecked himself by attempting to temporize with difficulties, at a moment when the greatest apparent rashness would really have been prudence. Whilst he threatened the Czar, he attempted to conciliate him. He declared war in a style so equivocal that it hardly amounted to active hostility. He attempted to fight and negotiate at once. To suit the views and consult the fears of a dubious ally, Austria, he checked his thunder "in mid-volley," forgetting that a semi-barbarous foe is only encouraged by forbearance; and by urging upon his ally, France, these timid counsels, he caused to be wasted in the Crimea armies which, in Poland and on the Pruth, might have brought Russia to her senses. The natural result has been that Lord Aberdeen was driven from power by popular indignation, and is stigmatized as the secret friend of a public enemy, a treacherous minister, and an Englishman with a Muscovite heart. The probability is, that whilst the war shall continue, every succeeding minister will be so stigmatized; but in the mean time, Lord Aberdeen must be content to share the fate of all statesmen who attempt to reconcile incompatibilities.

The political character of Lord Aberdeen is easily summed up. Like Sir Robert Peel, he is a Conservative with a few apparently liberal tendencies. His principal merit consists in his caution, and his practical knowledge of the immediate requirements of the time. As a debater he is heavy and somewhat pompous.

His diction is that of a scholar, but his speeches are destitute of that vivacity which high talent alone can give, and without which a man may be a speaker but not an orator.

Sir James Graham is one of the descendants of an ancient family, now seated at Netherby Hall in Cumberland, upon the estate of that name. He was born in 1792, and completed his education at Cambridge. In the mind of Mr Graham the seeds of ambition seem to have been early sown, and they soon germinated and produced fruit. Having spent a few years abroad, in no unprofitable manner, and with great credit to himself as a man of remarkable ability, and not having been destined to any profession, he soon felt that parliament was his natural avenue to distinction,—which has been the aim of his life. In point of fact he seems to have early adopted a new reading of the celebrated aphorism, and made it, "Get place; honestly if you can,—but get place!" Filled with these aspirations, and whilst yet only twenty-six years of age, he contested the borough of Hull upon what were then styled "Whig principles." The borough of Hull was at that time notorious for the venality of a large portion of its free burgesses, then the only electors. Acting, however, probably upon the principle of being all things to all men, Mr Graham, after an expensive contest, finished by a scrutiny equally expensive, succeeded; having beaten his Tory opponent, Mr Stainforth, by 104 votes. The triumph was, however, a dear one. In 1820, two years afterwards, died George III.; and this necessitating a dissolution of parliament, Mr Graham retired from public life rather than undergo the wasteful expenditure of another contested election. In 1819 he had married Miss Fanny Callender, the youngest daughter of Sir James Campbell of Ardkinglass; and in 1823, his father dying, he succeeded to the estate and baronetcy; becoming now Sir James Robert George Graham of Netherby.

Having succeeded to the paternal estate, and having now the

means to follow his inclinations unrestrained by paternal caution or remonstrance, Sir James became, at the general election of 1826, a candidate for the representation of the city of Carlisle, and was returned. Upon this occasion, Sir James professed principles of a more radically reforming cast than he had hitherto deemed it prudent to avow. It seems probable, from circumstances, that the mind of Sir James Graham, like those of many other persons of similar talent, had been deeply impressed by the events of the panic of the preceding December and January, and began to perceive that the real perils of the country had their source less in the corruption of men in power than in errors in monetary and financial matters. This seems demonstrated by the nature of the celebrated treatise which he published during the year that was signalized by his election for Carlisle; and this being admitted, it follows, as a matter of course, that Sir James, at this period, must have taken precisely the same views as those of Mr Cobbett and his avowed disciples, and held with them that the errors of 1819 could only be cured by the help of a House of Commons elected by the people at large.

Be this as it may, in the course of the year 1826, the member for Carlisle, to the constituency of which he knew such doctrines would not be unacceptable, put forth a publication, entitled "Corn and Currency," of which two large editions have been sold, which must for ever remain connected with his name, whether for honour or dishonour. In this for the most part very ably reasoned treatise, he fully exposed the blunders of which, in 1819, the Economists, and under their auspices the legislature, had been guilty. Having, however, shown the injustice of doubling the value of money and yet leaving the nominal amount of all the immense public engagements, contracted in depreciated currency, as before, Sir James unluckily made a proposal equally unjust. He proposed to deduct *thirty per cent.* from the dividend of the fundholder, whilst he left untouched the civil list, the pay of the army and

navy, and the salaries of the judges and other functionaries—all whose incomes had been added to in consequence of that very depreciation of money which the Act of 1819 went to rectify. This lapse brought down upon the baronet the criticism of Mr Cobbett, who seemed to claim towards the receiver of dividends the same privilege that Johnson claimed as to Garrick, and who, whilst he himself attacked him on all occasions, would not allow anybody else to do it on any. From either of the two great parties in the state, such a proposal as this of Sir James could not meet with any countenance; and the result was, that the writer never afterwards touched the subject. Sir James wanted distinction and preferment; and he accordingly, as he was sure to do in the course of a few years, discovered that treatises like that on "Corn and Currency" were not, whilst the great majority of all classes stolidly refused to understand the question, likely to assist a man to rise under any conceivable circumstances. Sir James accordingly made his peace with the Whigs, to whom his great and undeniable talents made him welcome; and on their accession to power in 1830, he gained his end, and became First Lord of the Admiralty under Earl Grey.

The astute and sagacious intellect, however, of Sir James Graham was never, as it appears, deceived by the vulgar notion that the Whig party had obtained an interminable lease of power. He saw that their conduct was about to cause a reaction, which in the end would prostrate them; and, together with Lord Stanley, he took the first opportunity of separating himself from the Melbourne-Russellite cabinet. The appropriation clause was the ostensible reason, the belief that the Whig ministry must soon succumb before Sir Robert Peel was the real motive, of this manœuvre. The death of William IV. for a period baffled this calculation; but the ultimate fall of the Melbourne ministry, amidst the absolute contempt of their former supporters, proved that the anticipations of Sir James were correct.

The Melbourne cabinet, after long clinging to a miserable power, dissolved finally in 1841; and under Sir Robert Peel, who succeeded them, Sir James Graham took office as Secretary for Home Affairs. In this post, Sir James has not, unhappily, reaped much credit. He no doubt in his subordinate capacity ably supported the great measure of his friend Sir Robert Peel—the final repeal of the corn-laws. He is also a participator in that absurd arrangement, whoever prompted it, known as the Bank Act of 1844. The deeds, however, in which he was most prominent were of a worse character. The violation of post-office faith in the case of Mazzini, through a series of months, and the betrayal of his correspondence to a foreign government, perhaps the most worthless on earth pretending to civilisation, has left an indelible blot upon the name and reputation of Sir James Graham. The results of the inquiry into these practices, demanded by Mr T. S. Duncombe, have entirely destroyed all reliance upon the honour of the British cabinet with regard to the correspondence of persons who may be obnoxious to them; a sad catastrophe for a government which boasts of resting upon the respect and not the fears of the people.

With the repeal of all laws for the protection of agriculture the power of Sir Robert Peel ended, and he did not live to resume it, as he unquestionably must have done had a longer span been vouchsafed him. After a vain attempt on the part of the Whigs, and another on the part of the Conservatives, to move the heavy wheels of government alone, the Coalition ministry of Lord Aberdeen was formed, under whom Sir James returned to his old post of the Admiralty, where he might have remained with credit to himself, had not his usually too cautious chief suffered himself to be involved in hostilities which neither of them ever really contemplated, and the enormous perils attending which no man understands better than Sir James Graham. The consequence of this foolish attempt to carry on a simulated war amidst negotiations for peace too significant to be successful, was to drive the Coalition cabinet

from power, and to cause the construction of another not likely to enjoy a longer term of existence; inasmuch as, amongst its numerous, potent, and increasing enemies, it has to contend against the powerful opposition of Sir James Graham.

The character of Sir James as a statesman may be briefly sketched. Amongst existing English statesmen there is not one equal to Sir James in massive strength of intellect and comprehensiveness of mind. Very few surpass him in power of expression and the talent of commanding and enforcing attention. He has injured himself, however, deeply by his too unscrupulous thirst after power and place, which has seduced him into a round of inconsistencies, offensive to a plain and simple people like the British nation. He set out a Whig; then became a Cobbettite Radical; again became a Whig; and lastly a liberal Tory, after the fashion of Sir Robert Peel. Of the latter, it was said that he had "many followers but no friends." Sir James Graham was unquestionably an exception. He perfectly understood Sir Robert's position and secret convictions; and Sir Robert knew it; and also knew that those of Sir James were similar. Hence Sir Robert Peel first sympathized with and then trusted him; and it is his highest praise to have recorded of him that this confidence, at all events, he never betrayed.

Mr GLADSTONE is the son of a Liverpool merchant, who, setting out as a small tradesman with slender means, at length settled at Liverpool, where he had managed to connect himself with the West India trade, at that time, owing to a peculiar combination of circumstances, as lucrative as even avarice could desire. In course of time he realized a large fortune, and became Sir John Gladstone, and owner of broad lands in the Scottish county of Forfar, whither he retired. Mr Gladstone, also a man of independent fortune, is his third son. The elder Gladstone was, like most of the wealthier mercantile class of Liverpool, a stanch Tory, and he of course educated, as far

as in him lay, his family in the same principles. His third son William, the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, soon began to exhibit considerable talent of a peculiar kind, and distinguished himself both at Eton and Oxford by his classical attainments. To the paternal line of politics he adhered, and, added to them peculiar ideas, gathered from his study of the mediæval theologians, of the claims of the Church; and these ideas he has helped to make fashionable in certain high quarters, to the great peril of an Establishment which was before sufficiently endangered by the contradictory dogmata and conflicting creeds of its members.

Studies of this kind are by no means a happy preparation for one who, like Mr Gladstone, was emulous of political and parliamentary distinction; but to these he was able to add other accomplishments better fitted to obtain for him the respect and attention of a miscellaneous body like the House of Commons, by no means remarkable either for its knowledge of or deference for the tenets of scholastic divinity.

Mr Gladstone entered parliament as one of the members for the Duke of Newcastle's borough of Newark in 1832, under the operation of the reform-bill, to the efficiency of which Mr Gladstone's election, by force of ducal influence, was no compliment. Mr Gladstone, however, is an honest politician. He took with him into the House of Commons all the high church, conservative, and mediæval theological notions, with which he had filled a naturally refined and elegant mind. The one might have suited the times of Laud, or Horsley, and the other the schools of Alexandria; but for a body constituted as is the House of Commons they were utterly unfit; and it is no small praise to record of Mr Gladstone, that he adhered to them as long as possible, and only relaxed them when convinced that, without such relaxation, he could not act as a practical statesman with any party.

The tenor of Mr Gladstone's way has been, upon the whole, much more consistent than that of the politicians by whom he

is surrounded, and he has generally taken honest views of the subjects which have come before him. He was strongly opposed to that insolent and unscrupulous series of outrages perpetrated by our Indian government against that law forbidding the importation into China of a pernicious drug, which ended in a murderous war with an unprepared and unoffending people. Holding himself a sort of mitigated creed of popery, he also defended, with great skill of argument, that act of the Pope, for the formation in England of a Roman-catholic hierarchy, which excited such a tumult of apprehension and exasperation, both equally needless. Against the excitement of that time, it was difficult indeed to contend; yet who, that will look calmly at the question, can hesitate to adopt Mr Gladstone's conclusion, that it cannot make any difference, either to himself or anybody else, whether a Roman-catholic clergyman shall call himself Bishop of Westminster, or Bishop of Bœotia?

In 1841, Mr Gladstone took permanent office for the first time under Sir Robert Peel, and became Vice-president of the Board of Trade, as well as Master of the Mint. He had, indeed, during the evanescent administration of Sir Robert in 1834, been named a Lord of the Treasury and Under-secretary for the Colonies; but as the hold of Sir Robert on office was lost as soon as he met parliament, this was little better than *vox et preterea nihil.* In spite of his theological eccentricities, the sagacious Premier had discovered in Mr Gladstone ability of a manageable and practical kind, and he made use of them. Before Sir Robert's exquisitely managed and logical argumentation, Mr Gladstone was over-matched; and he quickly was led to desert his Conservative principles, in traffic at least, and came over to the free-trade maxim (of Carthaginian origin), that the essence of all wisdom, commercially speaking, is "to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market." In fact, as a political economist, Mr Gladstone was educated by Sir Robert Peel; and he knows of the science precisely what his master was pleased to impart, and no more. In theology

Sir Robert found his protegé more versed and less manageable. The extension of the Grant to Maynooth College resuscitated in his breast all the old *odium theologicum* and leaven of religious polemics, in which his mind had been early steeped. Most truly and finely has Wordsworth said—

"The boy's the father of the man;"

and so Mr Gladstone and his patron found it. The unfortunate Under-secretary was now in Captain Macheath's position between his two wives,—"How happy could I be with either!" But the two he found incompatible. He accordingly resigned his office; and yet true at heart in his allegiance to Sir Robert, and now free from the imputation of selfish motives, he voted for the grant—a strain of nice and honourable feeling unhappily too rare in these degenerate times!

With Sir Robert Peel Mr Gladstone retired from office in 1846, and only again re-entered it under Lord Aberdeen, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer, and of course a conspicuous member of the unfortunate and short-lived coalition cabinet, now defunct. To the war in which the ministry suffered themselves, without intending it, to be entangled, Mr Gladstone was evidently from the first opposed. In the position which he then held, he must have seen all the perils and difficulties in store for him; and it is no derogation to say that, in trying to raise a war-revenue within the year, without loans, he took the honest but impracticable side. He had not yet learned that, when that plain path has once been deserted, "*vestigia nulla retrorsum.*" After the disasters which were sure to follow an unprepared war unwillingly commenced, public excitement soon drove the alarmed ministers from their position. The same sort of distrust must probably unseat their successors, until either war or peace be sought in earnest and without disguise; and by this Mr Gladstone may again profit. As a statesman, however, he will never rank high. Though living at an era when refined mediocrity is more likely to succeed than commanding genius, he will never pass for more than

an accomplished man of narrow views, endowed with a cultivated but circumscribed intellect. Like a seaman between two fog-banks, which he mistakes for reefs or shoals, he tacks perpetually between bigotry on one side and conservatism on the other, conducting an uneasy navigation between political mists on the larboard, and religious ones on the starboard, without, apparently, a chance of making any place where common sense may drop an anchor. Mr Gladstone, in short, is a man with many valuable mental gifts, totally spoiled by a misdirected education; and consequently unfit to take any prominent share in governing a people who will cling to the semblance of freedom, even after they have lost the substance, and who consider themselves rationally religious, after having given birth to more monstrosities of fanaticism than any Christian nation, perhaps, that ever yet existed.

Mr Sidney Herbert.—This gentleman, who entered the House of Commons at the same time with Mr Gladstone, is the son of the Earl of Pembroke. His father is the eleventh earl, and his mother, who was the earl's second countess, was the daughter of the Russian Count Woronzow, a circumstance which, since the commencement of hostilities between the Russians and Great Britain, has operated very much against him. As soon as the unwillingness of the ministry to make the plunge began to be apparent, and as soon as it was evident that they were forced into the war rather than voluntary parties to it,—Mr Herbert's relationship with this great Russian family was adduced as one of the reasons for this palpable backwardness, and Muscovite leanings were popularly attributed to him.

Mr Herbert began his parliamentary career as a Conservative in the most extended sense of the word. His education and the notions it had taught him inclined him to entertain the same overstrained ideas as to the claims of the Established Church that are or were held by Mr Gladstone;—whilst his general political course was regulated by that of Sir Robert

Peel, who at that time was the chosen and trusted representative of these opinions. As Sir Robert Peel during the first session of the "reformed parliament," as it was at that time generally styled, had little more than a hundred followers in the House of Commons, he had a truly forlorn battle to fight, nor did he, nor could he, derive any aid, in such a position as that, from such an auxiliary as was Mr Herbert. That singular political phenomenon, for it is little more, which has since attained a not very enviable notoriety under the name of Puseyism, had not then made any progress, and was more likely to bring down ridicule than to extend influence. There can be little doubt that it arose out of the despair of the then prostrate Conservative party, who seeing little or no chance of resuscitating in the breasts of the people that idea of the sacredness of arbitrary power preached by prelates like Dr Horsley or Juxon and Laud, applied themselves to the scheme of catholicizing the Anglican Church still farther, and as far as a liturgy singularly favourable to popery might allow of its being done, and thus in the garb of religious duty to revive those doctrines of political passiveness and mental subservience, which were carried to their greatest height by the semi-popish hierarchy of Elizabeth and James the First. During the first dozen years which followed the adoption of the Reform-bill, however, little progress had been made in this direction. Time was required. The aid of the exquisite architecture under the influence of which the Catholic piety of the middle ages found shelter was to be called in: and until this could be done, the new religious feelings which were sought to be thus infused into the breasts of the more serious thinkers of the English nation could have little influence, and men like Mr Herbert were merely accounted lingering remnants of a refined superstition the day of which was past.

Holding this class of opinions, Mr Herbert appeared only as an opponent of the measures of the Grey and Melbourne administrations until 1841, when his leader Sir Robert Peel was

reinstated in power. During this period he frequently addressed the House of Commons, without much selection of the topics on which he spoke. Whether the subject was a matter of home or of foreign policy—an appropriation clause, an extended suffrage, or protection to the poor voter by means of the ballot; —an intrigue in Spain, a Syriac war, or a Don Pacifico squabble, Mr Herbert was invariably to be found in opposition. He was listened to; but only as a man of high family, great possessions, and quiet and amiable private character is always listened to in the House of Commons.

After the triumph of Sir Robert Peel in 1841, Mr Herbert, as one of the stanchest and most painstaking supporters of the Conservative leader, was made Secretary to the Admiralty —which he afterwards exchanged for the post of Secretary at War. This was in 1845, and in 1846 he retired together with his leader from power after the final repeal of the corn-laws was carried under the pressure of the League and the famine in Ireland. In all the changes of opinions which characterized that singular period Mr Herbert concurred, and together with his chief drew upon himself the anger of the Protectionists, whose cause he had deserted. Personally he suffered little from this. Strong in family influence and wealth, he could not be driven from the representation of Wiltshire. Nor could the respect in which his general character was held by the House of Commons be shaken.

When, after the failure of the Earl of Derby to retain power on any terms, the coalition ministry was formed by Lord Aberdeen, he with Mr Gladstone might be said to represent the Peelite portion of the supporters of that ephemeral administration. Of the unpopularity into which after the unadvised Russian war it rapidly fell he got more than his share. His evident disinclination to drive matters to extremities was attributed at once to his family connexion with the Woronzows; and by the popular writers and declaimers of the time he was unceremoniously held up as a betrayer of British in-

terests and honour. Together with Lord Aberdeen he yielded to the storm, and retired from a cabinet in which the strange mutations which existing difficulties and the dislocation of all party ties cannot but produce, must probably again seat him. To any administration his vast family influence, his wealth, and excellent private character must make him a valuable appendage. Nor as an administrator is he to be despised. Of high or brilliant talent he is totally destitute; but as a diligent functionary, a steady advocate, and a respectable partisan, he must always be prized by any minister whom he can be persuaded to join. To comprehensiveness of intellect, to keen penetration of mind, or to high common sense even, he cannot make a claim; but moderate qualifications suit an era of mediocrity; and Mr Sidney Herbert, like Lord John Russell, may easily be conspicuous at a time when the dearth of political genius and worth seems to advance in the precise ratio of the growth of national embarrassment and political difficulty.

Mr CARDWELL, like many of the followers of the late Sir Robert Peel, is originally connected with trade, and exhibits most of the characteristics of men whose maxims are derived from commercial habits of thinking. He is a native of the great manufacturing county of Lancashire, and is the son of a Manchester manufacturer, in whom and in whose brothers considerable wealth has centred. Young Cardwell being of that available and manageable description of talent and temperament that is found by experience to conduce most surely to parliamentary success, discovered early a predilection for politics as a pursuit. For this his education as well as habits of life well fitted him; and by the liberality of his family he has been enabled independently to enter upon the arena of party strife, in which his success has not been small.

On entering the House of Commons, he first sat for the borough of Clitheroe; and all his predilections being of the

free-trading conservative cast, he very naturally from the first looked up to Sir Robert Peel as the "Magnus Apollo" of those who eschewed freedom in everything excepting trade. By Sir Robert Mr Cardwell was precisely the person most likely to be noticed. Grave, prudent, cautious and sententious, he exhibited the soberly plausible and not the brilliant in intellect; and this was exactly that which his patron wanted. No man knew better than Sir Robert Peel the men that were manageable and the men that were not. Hence, whilst the versatile and brilliant D'Israeli, during a length of time, studied in vain how to secure his regard, and whilst the fluent and fiery but irritable and petulant Roebuck would fain have been his friend, he readily availed himself of the more plodding and homely genius of Mr Cardwell, in whom he found not only a devoted admirer but a serviceable and obedient subaltern. In all debates involving matters of traffic or of "profit and loss," whether national or individual, Mr Cardwell had something to say; and even if unacquainted with the precise matter in dispute, had always at his command a certain sort of economic generalities, which, being general, admit of a wide application, and may, with a little ingenuity, be made to fit any case that may turn up.

It was probably owing to the influence of Sir Robert, in conjunction with his own fluency on commercial topics, that he became one of the members for Liverpool, where by the Conservative portion of the trading community he was regarded as a man destined to rise and to cut a figure, in virtue of the principle of free-trade, in which he was held to be profoundly versed. Nor can there be any doubt that Mr Cardwell has studied commercial questions with great diligence; and hence his readiness, so useful to any minister whenever a subject connected with traffic comes under debate. Sententious, grave, but prompt and stored with plausibilities, if he fails to convince an opponent, he rarely fails to puzzle him; and should his party be sorely pressed, he is always ready and at hand to raise (like the cuttle-fish) a dense and murky cloud of statistics

and figures, under cover of which a baffled minister may always contrive to escape.

After the loss of power by his leader Sir Robert Peel, his influence in Liverpool declined gradually. The free-traders, who approved of his principles as long as the results were thought to suit their own interests, began to hesitate when it was found necessary to buy customers by the sacrifice of the Navigation-law; and Mr Cardwell was at length obliged to take refuge in the city of Oxford, where his High Church and Conservative notions were more acceptable than in the great trading mart of Liverpool.

When the Coalition Administration was formed by Lord Aberdeen and the Whig party joining to expel Lord Derby from power, Mr Cardwell filled the post of President of the Board of Trade, for which his acquaintance with commercial questions and statistics seemed particularly to qualify him. Nor can it be affirmed that he did not discharge its duties with credit and respectability.

Mr Cardwell evidently shares the conviction of his party that, unless a pacification of hostilities with Russia can be at some price arrived at, the consequences to this country may be such as few persons perhaps at present anticipate. Hence this gentleman also has shared in the odium and in the imputations of a treasonable leaning towards England's most insidious enemy, Russia, which have been cast upon all who have seen the enormous perils which a lengthened conflict may produce, and who would, if practicable, evade them by some arrangement not absolutely dishonourable to their country.

That this feeling is now becoming that of the most influential classes of the community is, gradually and by imperceptible degrees, becoming apparent; and by the reaction which may follow, Mr Cardwell, with the rest of his party, may probably profit. Of that party he never can become a leader; but his abilities are unquestionably such as to constitute him a most useful subaltern.

In closing this brief notice of Sir Robert Peel's principal successors, there is one remark to be made. It is a fact strongly corroborative of the truth of the character given to Sir Robert's policy in the course of these volumes, that the section of politicians holding his views have suffered more by the general elections since his loss of power than any other political party in the state. This was a consequence easily foreseen. The policy of Sir Robert Peel constitutes a fragment merely. By the great majority of those who contemplate it, its tendency, meaning, and motives are not understood. But an unintelligible creed cannot furnish a popular election-cry, and without it the best party may fail; and in this way alone is the weakness of the Peel party in the House of Commons to be accounted for.

In addition to this want of a rallying principle of a plain and intelligible kind, another source of unpopularity awaits them, by which, in case of a dissolution of parliament on the war-question, they probably must suffer. This source of unpopularity is their sympathy with those who will accept peace at any price, from an enemy to whom the humiliation of Great Britain, and the consequent injury to her influence, especially in India, has long been a favourite object. To whatever motive this shrinking from a conflict,—of vital consequence to the very existence of Great Britain as a great nation,—may be popularly attributed, it in all human probability arises chiefly from their wish to preserve intact, at any sacrifice, the monetary arrangements upon which their late leader unfortunately tried to found a reputation; and from their natural desire to secure the grateful support of the tremendously powerful body of persons to whom this must be—whilst human nature remains what it is—a matter of paramount interest. If the whole of the money engagements, of whatever consisting, liable to suffer under a break-down of the Act of 1819 and a new depreciation of the circulating medium, were to be summed up, the amount would not be found to be much less than TWO

THOUSAND MILLIONS STERLING, of which every owner must deprecate a war or anything else likely to produce a catastrophe so sweeping. To such men as Sir James Graham and Mr Gladstone this is well known; and hence their junction with men whose principles in all else are opposed to theirs—with such politicians as Mr Cobden and Mr Bright; with the Protectionist D'Israeli; and with the Whig magnates Earl Grey and Lord John Russell, all of whom are now only the mouthpieces of this pervading interest, who on this point are all agreed.

In short, it seems to be now manifest that the successors of Sir Robert Peel can only support themselves, as a political section, by means of a coalition with some stronger party. Without inheriting the vast available talent and almost unbounded influence of their late leader, they have succeeded to all the difficulties accompanying uncertainty of principle and a political creed unacceptable, in some or other of its leanings, to the greater parties in the state.

Like all combinations that depend upon exquisite management more than originality of view or soundness of principle, the party of Sir Robert Peel seem destined to disappear with him who united them, unless supported by a junction with a stronger. As an appendage to a liberal Conservative or a moderate Whig Administration, they may endure for a season; but left alone as a power in the state, they must, in no long time, become contemptible.

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